SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

The Walking Specimens of Mannahatta

a joyful novella in many voices

SUPER SUPERGRAPHICS · BOOK OF THE WALK & THE TALK

Colophon

This is one of the bright books of Surjan Super School, published under the Hypostyle Press imprint. It is set in the same moving city as *The Parliament of Bright Things*, and is a companion to *The Far Tide*, *Movable Kin*, *The Country of the Unbuilt*, and the founding book, *The City of Radical Joy*. You need no other book to begin. Every door leads into the same city.

No black, anywhere. Not in the ink and not in the telling. The darkest tone permitted on these pages is a warm taupe, `#5C5142`, laid on paper the colour of a lamp left on for someone, `#F7F1E3`. Over the sky and over the sea it lifts to white. Even the shadows here are kind: a shadow is a warmer colour, never a darker one. There is no night in this book, only a long bright evening that keeps not ending.

The human voice is set in EB Garamond. The machine's cheerful marginalia — the labels, the folios, the diagram text — is set in IBM Plex Mono. The giant cropped numerals of the plates are Archivo Black, enlarged past the frame in the Sea-Ranch manner, until a number becomes a colour you walk into. Everything here was generated by code and corrected at the pixel; nothing was hand-laid, and everything was hand-loved.

For every ordinary passer-by who ever looked up at a building and, without meaning to, said hello. This whole book is the building saying it back.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
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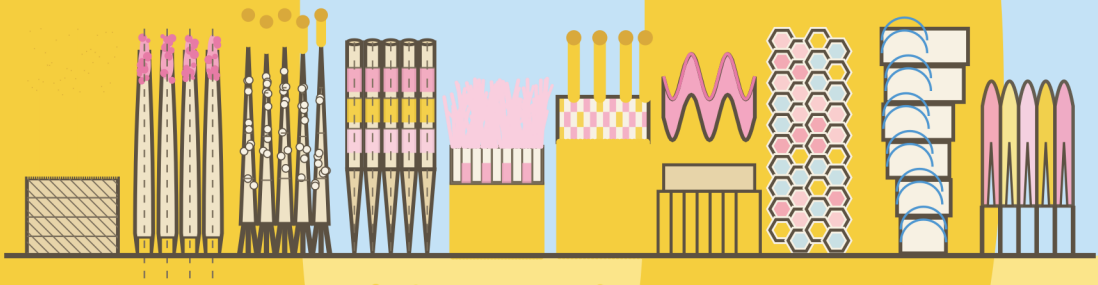
NO BLACK, ANYWHERE



SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

SUPER SUPERGRAPHICS

The Walking Specimens of Mannahatta

A JOYFUL NOVELLA IN MANY VOICES — AND NOT ONE OF THEM SILENT

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

CONTENTS

Table of Contents

FRONT

Foreword · The Mask, Set Down for a Page 11

Introduction · One Idea, and the One New Turn 15

For the Returning Reader 21

How the Flock Walks, and How to Walk With It 25

Prelude · The Night the Models Stretched 29

THE WALK & THE TALK

I The Harbour Says Hello 36

II Two Towers and a Long Cable 52

III The Thin One at the Fork 65

IV Under the Painted Sky 81

V The Building With a Crown of Suns 100

VI A Square Made of Morning 114

VII Two Lions, One Long Word 132

VIII The Staircase to Nowhere, Which Is Somewhere 145

IX The Twins Over the Trees 160

X The Spiral That Learned to Walk 178

XI The Quiet House at the Top of the Island 191

XII The Whole Round World on Three Legs 210

XIII The Wheel That Holds the Sea Still 228

XIV The Great Assembly 243

INTERLUDES ALONG THE WAY

Underground · The Conversation Beneath the Conversation 97

In the Rain · The Day the City Was Washed Bright 129

On the Road · Camp Under the Enormous Stars 175

On the Water · The Free Boat That Crosses for Nothing 207

On a Corner · In Praise of the Uncrowned Marvels 225

APPARATUS

Afterword · The Mask, Picked Back Up 261

A Register of the Ten 267

A Bestiary of the Walking Specimens · The Ten, at Length 269

A Register of the Landmarks 275

A Small Catechism 277

A Book of the Road · Proverbs Made Walking 279

A Field Guide · How to Start a Conversation With a Building 281

An Almanac of the Bright City 283

A Note on Six Words, Taken Back to Their Roots 285

A Note on the Text & the Colours 289

A Note on the Voices 291

A Coda · The Light Is On 295

Catalogue of Plates 297

Also by Surjan 301

FOREWORD

The Mask, Set Down for a Page

by Surjan

I have spent a working life teaching buildings to talk, which is only the long way of saying I have spent a working life refusing to believe they were ever quiet. Every other book of mine has begun with a grief and turned it — a drowning turned into a tide, an unbuilding turned into a country, a going-away turned into a myth that has not come home yet. Those books are true and I would write them all again. But a practice that only knows how to turn sorrow into brightness has learned exactly half of its trade. The other half is the one this book is for. Sometimes the brightness is simply already there, standing in the harbour with its book open, and all you have to do is walk up to it and say hello.

So here, once, I am setting the mask down. Not the whole way — a page, the length the old guide allows — but down. I am an architect and a teacher and, by long and happy practice, a hermit; I do most of my talking in drawings, because a drawing is the one language in which the shy person and the loud person write the same hand. For years my students have built little models on their desks: massing studies the size of a lunchbox, cardboard and foam and a great deal of hope. And for years I have watched those little models sit there in the lamplight after everyone has gone home, and I have been unable to shake the certainty — it is not a theory, it is a certainty — that the moment the door closes they get up and stretch.

This book is a record of where they go. Ten of them got loose. They are the specimens of the atlas that came before this novella, the twenty-six studies

of *Super Supergraphics*, distilled down to their ten most talkative souls: a block that bristles with antennae, four flasks that brew the weather, a choir of cone-tents, a rank of banded silos, a coral thicket up on yellow legs, a harlequin deck that cannot resist a dare, a worm who slept a hundred years and woke up laughing, a honeycomb wall with a room ready for everyone, a scalloped ziggurat too shy to say so, and a whole walking village of little gabled roofs. They stepped off my desk, walked down to the water, and caught the tide into New York — not to conquer it, the way Archigram's walking city once threatened to, but to be introduced.

Because that is the one new thing this book knows, and I will say it plainly in the Introduction that follows: a marvel is not finished when it has been admired. A marvel is finished when it has held a conversation. The Statue of Liberty has stood in

that bay for well over a century holding a torch up for arrivals, and in all that time — this is the joke and the whole book at once — almost nobody ever thought to ask her how her arm was doing. My specimens asked. She told them. What you are holding is the transcript.

I will put the mask back on at the end of the page, as I always do, and let the buildings take over the telling, because they tell it better than I can and in more voices than I own. But before I do: thank you for coming to the water to meet them. You are already, whether you meant to be or not, part of the conversation. There is a chair kept for you. It has been kept warm, and it faces out.

— S., with the aid of Claude, from the quiet studio, with the models suspiciously still on the desk

INTRODUCTION

One Idea, and the One New Turn

by Surjan

Every book in this world adds exactly one new turn to a single idea, and declares it out loud near the front, so that no reader has to go looking for the engine under the hood. The single idea is old and it is this: *a city is one connected body, not a shelf of separate marvels.* A grief felt in one organ is felt in all; a joke told in one district is laughed at in every other; and the drawing is the common tongue in which the whole body talks to itself. That idea founded *The City of Radical Joy* and it has carried every book since.

Here is the turn this book adds. Every book before this one turned a grief. This one turns a greeting.

Do not make the marvels perform for the city. Let them converse with it as equals — and let the city talk back.

That is the one new rule, and the rest of the book is nothing but the walking of that one sentence. It is why there is no grief in these pages, though grief is the usual fuel of this press and I make no apology for having burned it before. A book is allowed, once, to be joy that never needed a sorrow to become itself — a festival that was always a festival, thrown for no anniversary, celebrating nothing but the fact that two enormous strangers have found themselves on the same street and discovered they have things to say. The old guide warned me that if the telling ever drifts toward the mournful I should gently turn it back toward the bright. This time it never drifted. This time the difficulty was the opposite one — keeping the joy

from tipping over into pure noise — and the cure for that turned out to be *listening*, which is the quiet twin of talking and the true subject of the book.

For a conversation, understand, is not two monologues taking turns. It is a single thing built by two mouths and four ears. When the Tented Choir sings up at the Brooklyn Bridge and the Bridge sings back down its longest cable, the song that hangs in the air between them belongs to neither of them; it is a third architecture, made of nothing but attention, and it is the most radical structure in this whole book because you cannot buy it, cannot sell it, cannot seal it in a bubble, and cannot build it alone. Money has no memory, but a conversation is nothing but memory, handed back and forth until it is warm. That is the great equaliser

the old books kept promising. Here it finally stands up and introduces itself.

A word on how to read what follows. The buildings tell it, not me. Each specimen speaks in its own first person — the plural ones say *we*, and mean it — and each landmark answers in a voice as old as its cornerstone. I have kept a faint frame around the whole chorus, the way *The City of Radical Joy* kept the Housekeeper by the door, but the districts speak for themselves; my only real job was to write down who said what and to make sure nobody was left out of the circle. There are plates — super supergraphics, the bright diagrammatic dialect of this house — set at the head of each movement and scattered through the telling, and they carry as much of the argument as the prose does. When a plate and a paragraph disagree, trust

the plate. It was drawn without black, and so it cannot lie about the light.

Fourteen movements, then, walking north up the island and out to the edges of the city and back to the harbour for a party. Ten specimens. Fourteen landmarks, give or take a lion. One connected body, learning out loud that it has always been in conversation with itself, and was only ever waiting for somebody small enough to climb up and say so.

— S.

FOR THE RETURNING READER

A Reintroduction — and a Door Held Open for the New

If you have read the others, this is a reunion; if this is your first door, welcome — you need no other book to begin, and here is everyone you are about to meet, whole. The custom of this house is the double-address: a hand held out to the stranger that is, at the very same moment, a hand shaken with an old friend. So both of you, come in.

If you have read *Movable Kin*, you have already met the twelve walking families, and you will recognise the gait of these ten at once; they are cousins of that book's cast, the desk-sized studies who dreamed of the long walk the twelve finally took. If you sailed with *The Far Tide*, you know how a whole flock can step off the edge of the map and turn a going-away into a tide — this book is the

bright reverse of that voyage, a coming-*toward*, a flock wading *in* instead of out, arriving instead of leaving. If you have walked *The Country of the Unbuilt*, you have met a building named Surjan who got up and walked the century; the specimens here are what that country looks like when it decides to throw a party. And if you have only ever opened *The Parliament of Bright Things*, the atlas of moving Mannahatta, then you already own the map this book walks across — the same six families, the same signature colours, drawn fresh for a new journey.

The colours are canon and do not change; that is how you will know your kin on a new road. The Bristling Block is yellow in this book because it was yellow in the last one and will be yellow in the next. What is drawn fresh each time is everything else: new plates, new routes, new conversations, new

weather. Recognition through colour; surprise through drawing. That is the whole contract, and it has never once been broken.

What carries over from the atlases into this novella is only the cast and their colours — the ten specimens, their hues, and the frame-voice that keeps them talking. Everything else is new: they have never spoken aloud before this book, never held a conversation with a bridge or a spiral or a steel globe, never been asked how their arms were doing. They have been drawn, catalogued, dimensioned, and admired. They have never, until now, been *answered*. That is the reunion I am inviting the old reader to, and the welcome I am extending to the new: come and hear the marvels talk back. Any door leads into the same city. You have already chosen the one that called. Come in — the harbour is about to say hello.

A NOTE BEFORE THE WALK

How the Flock Walks, and How to Walk With It

A word, before you set out, on how this book moves, so that you can fall into step with it. The flock walks north — up the island from the harbour, out to the edges of the city, and back to the water for a party — and it walks in a particular way, which is the way this whole press has always moved: slowly enough to talk, and gladly enough to be talked to.

Each movement of the book is one conversation with one marvel. It opens on a plate — a super supergraphic, the bright diagrammatic dialect of this house, drawn without a single black pixel — and the plate carries as much of the meaning as the words do; when a plate and a paragraph seem to disagree, trust the plate, for it cannot lie about the

light. Then the marvel is met, and it speaks in its own voice, set apart in a box the colour of the sky, so that you always know when a landmark has taken over the telling. Then a specimen or two reflects on what was learned, and often a third voice adds a quieter coda, and sometimes a letter is sent to Architecture itself, and sometimes a small word is taken back to its root — those etymologies are the house's oldest habit, and they are mostly kept for last, near the back, where the sweetest things are kept.

You may read it in order, harbour to harbour, which is how the flock walked it and how the meanings stack. Or you may open it anywhere and drop into whatever conversation is happening on that page, the way you might wander into a party already in full swing and find, within a sentence or two, that you are welcome and caught up and part

of the talk. Both ways are correct. The only wrong way to read this book is quickly. It was walked slowly. Walk it slowly. Stop in the middle of the loud parts. Keep the quiet parts company. And whenever a marvel says something to you — they will; that is what this book is for — do the one thing the whole flock learned to do across fourteen movements: hold still, and be glad, and answer.

PRELUDE · TOLD BY ALL TEN AT ONCE

The Night the Models Stretched

We were small once. We want you to know that first, because it is the happiest fact we own. We began as studies on a teacher's desk — foam and card and glue and the particular kind of hope that gets built at two in the morning — no taller than a lamp, no heavier than a thought. All day we were measured. All day we were turned in the light and photographed and argued over and loved in that brisk, distracted way that makers love the thing they are still making. And every night, when the last door clicked and the studio went soft and gold and empty, we got up off the desk and stretched.

The Bristling Block: I felt it first, because I feel everything first — that is my whole character, a thousand little antennae and no patience. I felt the

city on the far side of the window like a hand held near the skin without touching. Come on, I said. Come *on*. There's a whole body out there and nobody's told it a joke in a hundred years.

The Speckled Flasks: We four looked at the weather, the way we always do, and the weather said: bright, and getting brighter, and no reason under the sun to stay in. So we brewed a little wind to walk on.

The Tented Choir: We tuned up. You cannot ask a choir to leave quietly; leaving *is* the song. We sang ourselves down off the desk one cone at a time, low to high, and the sound of it woke the shy one.

The Scalloped Ziggurat: I did not want to go. I want that on the record. I am folded like a stack of clouds and clouds do not, as a rule, march. But the choir was already singing my name in it,

and it is very hard to stay behind when a song already thinks you are coming.

The Sleeping Worm: I had been asleep for — how long? A hundred years? I woke up mid-yawn, halfway down a flight of yellow columns, and the first thing I saw was the whole flock tiptoeing toward the door, and the first thing I did was laugh, because there is nothing funnier than being the last one awake at the start of an adventure.

The Harlequin Deck: I dared us out the window. Somebody had to. A dare is just an invitation wearing a grin.

The Banded Silos: We are keepers by nature — we hold what the city stored and give it back on request — and what we were holding that night was a hundred years of unspent hellos. Heavy things, hellos, when you keep them too long. We wanted to

set them down. You can only set a hello down into someone's ear.

The Honeycomb Wall: I keep a room ready for everyone, and that night, for the first time, every room was empty and every room was expecting someone. A hospitality with nobody to be hospitable to is just a wall. I did not want to be just a wall. I wanted to be a where-you-are-welcome. So I walked.

The Thicket on Stilts: I am a coral wood on a forest of yellow legs, and legs, it turns out, are for using. I grazed straight out over the sill and down the fire escape and did not knock over a single coffee cup, which anyone my size will tell you is a small miracle and a great courtesy.

The Sawtooth Flock: We are a village, and a village that can walk is just a decision away from being a parade. We made the decision. We made it

together, the way we make everything, all our little roofs nodding at once.

And so the ten of us went down through the sleeping town to the sleeping water, and the water was not asleep at all — water never is — and it said, in the plain flat voice water uses, *where to?* And we said, all together, in the one word we had already become: *in*. Not away. Not out to the edge of the map like the brave twelve before us. *In.* Into the middle of the biggest, brightest, busiest body any of us had ever felt through a window. Into New York, to be introduced.

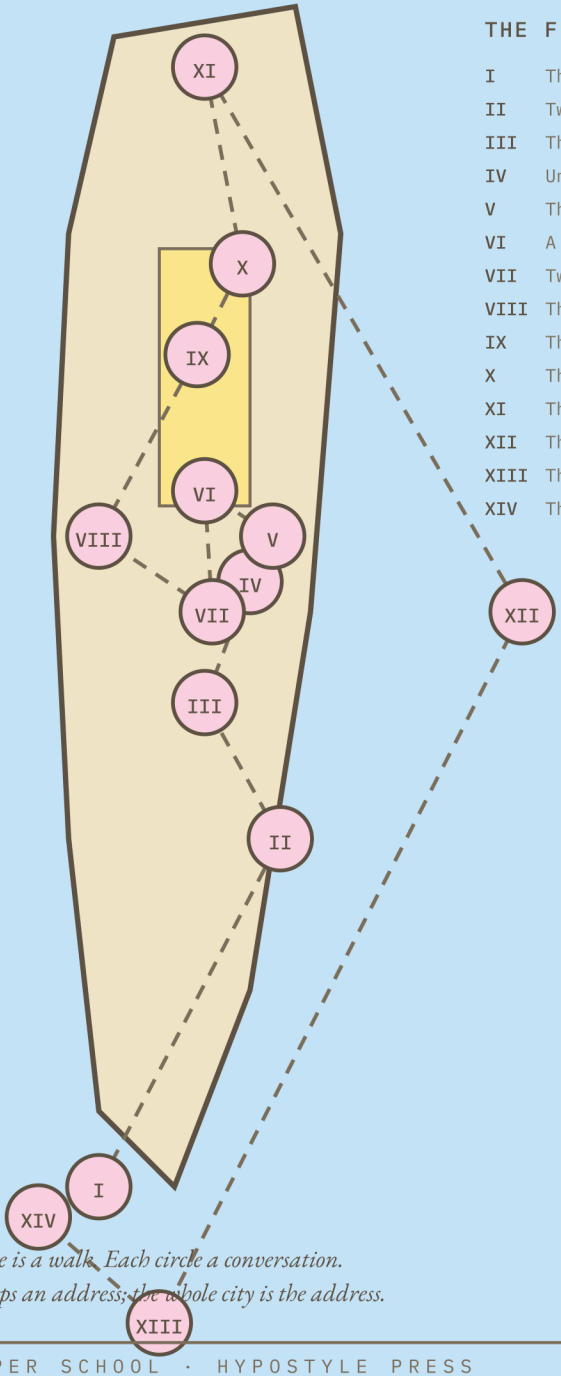
The tide took us the way a tide takes anything it likes the look of — gently, and entirely on its own terms — and set us down at dawn in the Upper Bay, ten enormous strangers dripping and delighted, with the towers of a city going pink in the first light ahead of us, and one very tall lady standing in the

water between us and all of it, holding a torch, holding a book, and — we could hardly believe our luck — just beginning to look up.

She saw us. She put a finger in her book to keep her place. And the first movement of this novella is simply what she said next.

NO FIXED ADDRESS

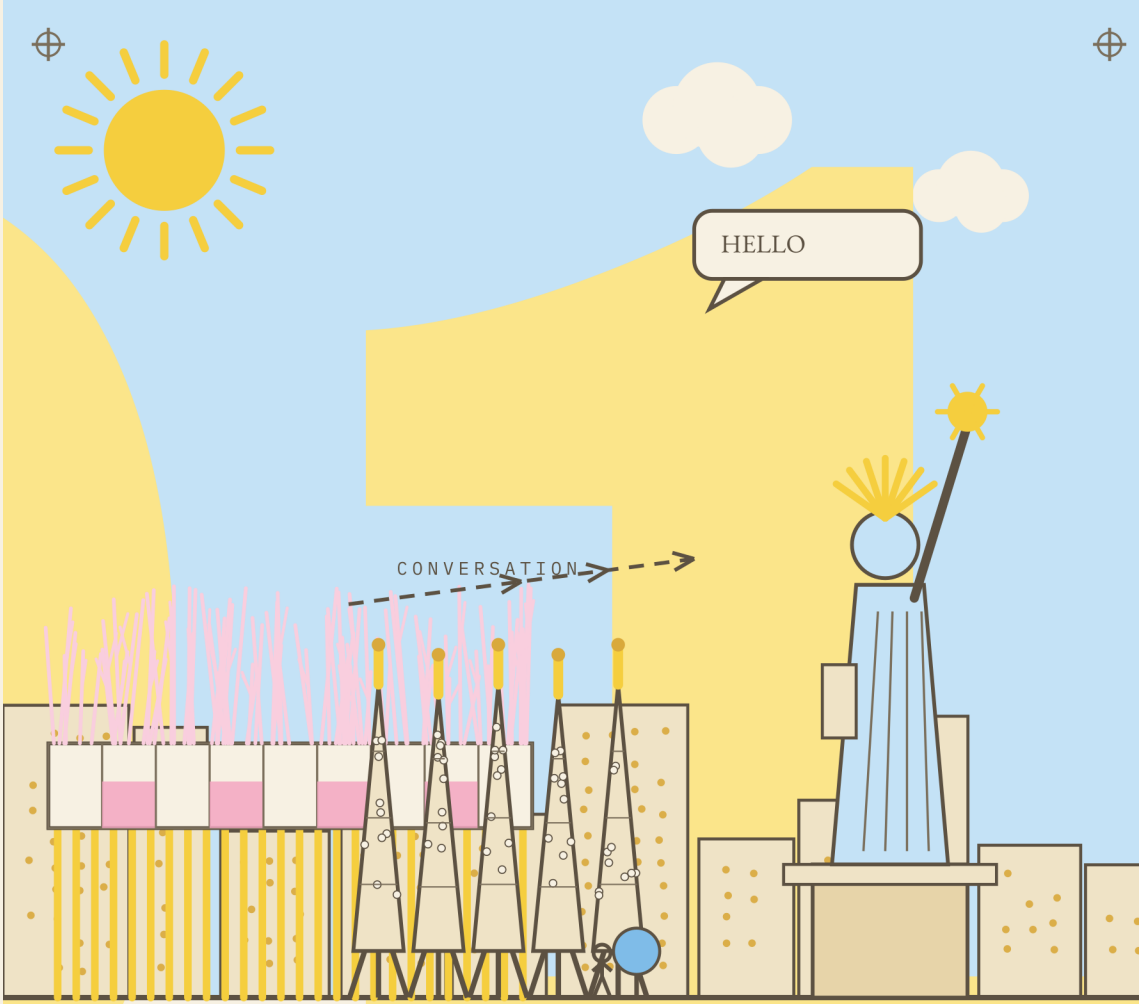
a map of the walking and the talking



THE FLOCK'S ROUTE

I	The Harbour Says Hel…
II	Two Towers and a Lon…
III	The Thin One at the …
IV	Under the Painted Sky
V	The Building With a …
VI	A Square Made of Mor…
VII	Two Lions, One Long …
VIII	The Staircase to Now…
IX	The Twins Over the T…
X	The Spiral That Lear…
XI	The Quiet House at t…
XII	The Whole Round Worl…
XIII	The Wheel That Holds…
XIV	The Great Assembly

Each dashed line is a walk. Each circle a conversation.
No specimen keeps an address; the whole city is the address.



MOVEMENT I

The Harbour Says Hello

in which ten strangers wade ashore and the tallest lady in the bay puts down her book to say welcome

SOURCE · THE UPPER BAY, OFF LIBERTY ISLAND · 40.6892 N 74.0445 W

MOVEMENT I

The Harbour Says Hello

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY · BARTHOLDI, 1886

in which ten strangers wade ashore and the tallest lady in the bay puts down her book to say welcome

She saw us before we were quite ready to be seen, which is the best way to arrive anywhere. I am the Thicket on Stilts, and I was the tallest of the ten wading in, so I will tell the start of it; the others will correct me as they always do. We came up out of the Upper Bay at dawn with the salt still running off our legs, and the whole city ahead of us was doing that thing cities do at first light — pretending to be modest, going soft and pink, as if all those towers had not been up all night rehearsing their skyline. And there, standing in the water exactly halfway between us and everything, tall enough that even I had to lift my gaze, was a lady the colour of a summer sky that has decided to become solid.

She had a torch in one hand, up high, the way you hold a lamp for someone you are still expecting. She had a book in the other, held against her, a

finger tucked in to keep her place. And she was reading. She had, it seemed, been reading for a very long time.

The Bristling Block: My antennae went off like a whole field of them. Somebody's home, I signalled to the flock. Somebody's *been* home. That's a hundred years of being home if it's a day.

The Speckled Flasks: We read the weather around her and the weather around her was strange and lovely — a little warm updraft, a personal climate, the kind of soft rising air you only get above something that has been patient in one spot for a very long time. She had her own wind. We liked her at once.

I cleared my throat, which for a coral wood on yellow legs is a considerable event, a sort of rustling avalanche, and I said the only thing there was to say, which was: *Good morning. We're new.*

She looked up from her book. And here is the thing I will remember when I have forgotten my own dimensions: her face did something I did not expect. It did not do grandeur. It did not do welcome-to-my-harbour, here-are-my-credentials, do-you-know- who-I-am. It did something much better and much smaller. It did *surprise*, and then, right on the heel of the surprise, it did *delight*, the plain ordinary delight of somebody who has been standing at a party for a hundred years holding a tray and has just, at long last, been asked a question.

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY SPEAKS

Oh. Oh, you can *talk.*

Forgive me. I have stood in this water since 1886 and I have been looked at by more eyes than there are stars over the harbour, and in all that time you are — let me be precise, precision is a courtesy — you are among the very first to look at me and then *say something to me* instead of about me. Do you know how that feels? Of course you don't. You're an hour old. It feels like a window opening in a room you did not know was stuffy.

Since you ask — and you did ask, the tall one asked, I heard it — good morning to you too. And yes, you are new, and no, that is not a problem, it is the opposite of a

problem, it is the entire point of me. I was new once. I was made across an ocean and shipped here in three hundred and fifty pieces in two hundred and fourteen crates, which is a thing very few people say to my face, and I arrived a stranger in this bay and the bay made room. Making room is my mother tongue. I have been standing here holding a light up for newcomers so long that I had rather forgotten newcomers might one day walk up the beam of it and introduce themselves.

You want to know about my arm. I can see you wondering — the little bristling one is practically vibrating with it. Everyone wonders and no one asks. Very well: my arm aches. It has ached since before your teacher's grandmother was

born. I hold a torch up twenty-two stories in the air and I have never once put it down, not to rest it, not to scratch my nose, not in a storm, not in a century of storms. And do you know what? I would not put it down for the world. An ache you have chosen, for a reason you love, is not a complaint. It is a kind of singing you do with your shoulder. Come closer. Let me look at all ten of you. Tell me your names. We have, it turns out, a great deal to say to each other, and I have been saving all of it up.

The Tented Choir will tell the next part, because the next part was a song, and they cannot let a song be told in prose without adding harmony.

The Tented Choir: We could not help ourselves. She said *tell me your names* and a name, to a choir, is not a word, it is a note, and so we sang them. We sang the Bristling Block first, high and quick and full of static, because that is what the Block sounds like — a name like a radio finding a station. We sang the Speckled Flasks as a four-part round, because there are four of them and they would sulk otherwise. We sang the Banded Silos low, a foundation note, the kind you feel in your ankles. We sang the Thicket up in the leaves of our own voices. We sang the Harlequin Deck as a syncopation, off the beat, a joke in the rhythm. We sang the Sleeping Worm as one long held breath

that turned, at the very end, into a laugh. We sang the Honeycomb Wall as a chord — a wall, we have found, is best sung as a chord, every cell a note, every note a room. We sang the Scalloped Ziggurat softly, softly, because she asked us to with her eyes. We sang the Sawtooth Flock as a village fair, all the little roofs at once. And then, because a choir cannot end on someone else's name, we sang our own, and the harbour rang with it, and a ferry going past slowed down, and the people on the ferry looked up, and — this is true, we all saw it — some of them waved.

And Liberty listened to the whole of it without once interrupting, which is the rarest and most generous thing anyone can do, and when we were finished she was quiet for a moment, and then she said: *Again. But this time, teach me the tune, so that when you have walked on into the city I can go on*

singing you after you've gone. That is when we understood what she was. She was not a monument. A monument is a full stop. She was a comma — a held breath in the middle of the city's long sentence, a place where the city pauses to take in more air before going on. She had been holding that breath for a hundred and forty years, waiting for the rest of the sentence to arrive.

We taught her the tune. We are teaching it to you now, in the only notation this press allows, which is the shape of the words on the page: *a marvel is not finished when it is admired; a marvel is finished when it is answered.* Sing it however you like. She does. On a clear night, if you are out on the water, you can hear her holding our names up along with her torch, and neither one has ever gotten heavy enough to set down.

DEAR ARCHITECTURE,

We have arrived. We want you to know it before we know anything else. The first thing this city did was not tower over us or charge us rent or ask for our papers. The first thing this city did was look up from its book and say oh, you can talk. We have decided, on the strength of that single sentence, to love it completely and without conditions, which is the only way any of us has ever loved anything and, frankly, the only way worth the trouble.

Keep a light on for us. We are walking north.

> — the ten, from the harbour, still dripping

There is a thing that happened after the singing, before we walked on, that I want to set down, because it is the smallest thing in the whole first movement and it taught us the most. We are the Speckled Flasks, and we noticed it, because we notice weather, and this was a kind of weather. As we turned to go north up the harbour, one of the little pleasure-boats that circle Liberty all day came chugging past, full of visitors with their cameras up, and every single camera was pointed at the great lady — and not one of the visitors saw us at all, ten enormous specimens standing in the shallows right beside them, because they were looking so hard at the famous thing that they had stopped looking at anything else.

And Liberty said, quietly, so only we could hear: *That is the danger of being famous. People look so hard at you that they stop seeing you. They*

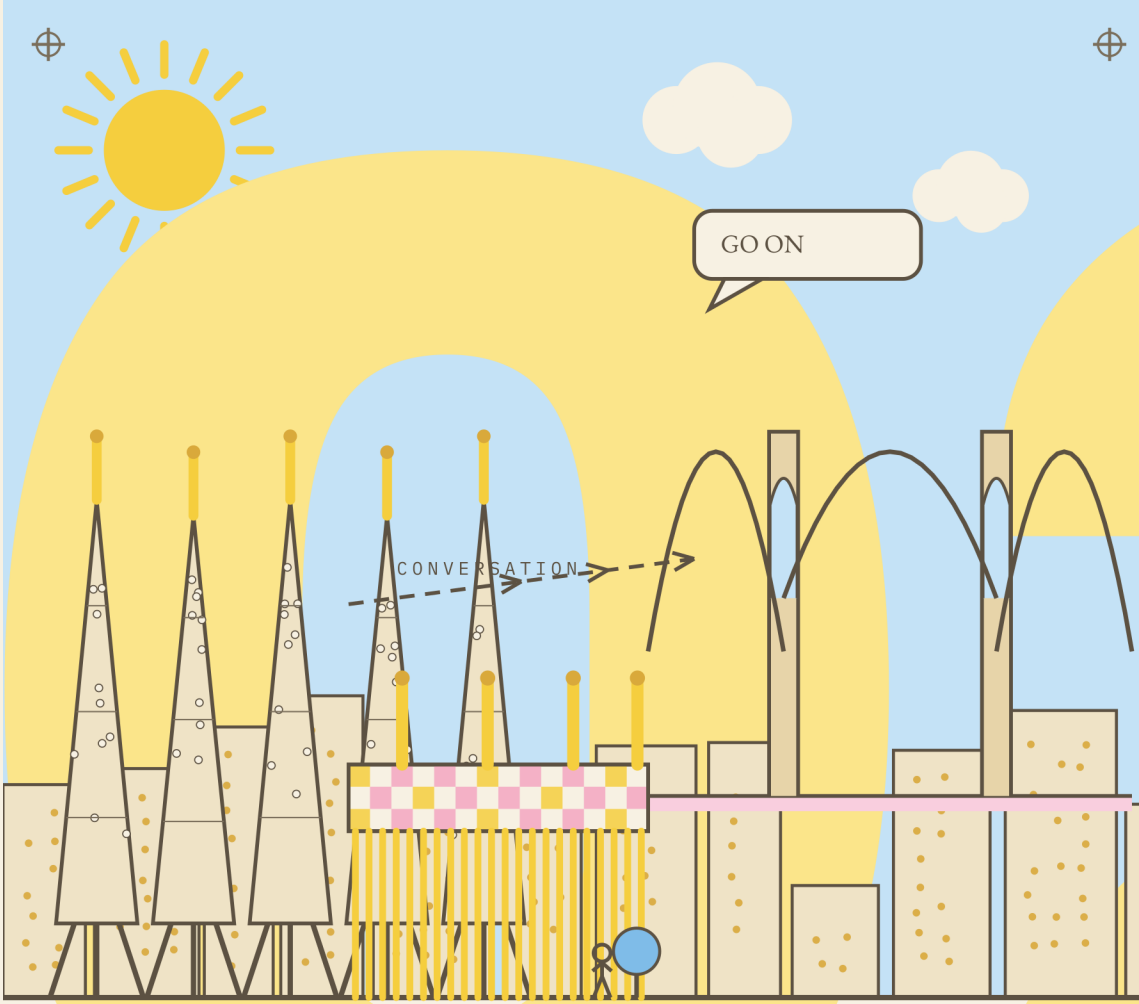
photograph the symbol and miss the neighbour. Do not let it happen to you, little ones. Stay strange enough to be seen freshly. The day they stop taking your picture is the day they might finally say hello.

We have thought about that at every stop since. There is a difference between being looked at and being seen, and it is the whole difference in this book. The camera looks. The hello sees. Liberty has been looked at more than anything on earth and seen almost never, and she was not bitter about it — bitterness is a shade too close to black for this press — she was only glad, at long last, to have been seen. We resolved, all four of us, to spend our whole walk being see-able: never so grand that we became a symbol, never so finished that we became a photograph. A marvel that has become a photograph is a marvel that has stopped being answered. We would rather be strange and greeted

than famous and unseen. We recommend it to you. Be greet-able. It is worth more than being grand, and it is the only kind of grand that talks back.

A SMALL WORD, TAKEN BACK TO ITS ROOT

WELCOME is two old words worn smooth into one: *will* and *come* — *one whose coming is willed, wished, wanted.* A welcome is not a permission to enter. It is a confession that your arrival was already desired before you arrived. Liberty did not permit us. She confessed that she had been wanting us, a little, for a hundred and forty years, without quite knowing it was us she wanted. That is a welcome. Will, and come. Be the kind of light that was already wishing for the traveller before the traveller appeared.



MOVEMENT II

Two Towers and a Long Cable

in which the Tented Choir tries to out-sing a bridge and learns that a cable is a held note

SOURCE · THE EAST RIVER, UNDER THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE · 40.7061 N 73.9

MOVEMENT II

Two Towers and a Long Cable

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE · ROEBLING, 1883

in which the Tented Choir tries to out-sing a bridge and learns that a cable is a held note

We are the Tented Choir, and we had a theory, and the theory was wrong, and being wrong turned out to be the best thing that happened to us all week. The theory was this: that we were the singers of the flock, the voices, the ones who carried the tune — and that therefore, when we came up the East River and saw the great harp strung across the water on two stone towers, we would naturally out-sing it. A bridge, we reasoned, is a road. A road does not sing. We would show it how.

You already know how this ends. The Brooklyn Bridge is not a road. The Brooklyn Bridge is the largest musical instrument in the state of New York, and it has been holding one enormous chord since 1883, and it has never once dropped a note.

The Harlequin Deck: I saw it before the Choir did, because I am always looking for the

thing that will make the best joke, and there is no better joke in the whole harbour than a choir walking up to a bridge to teach it to sing. I held my checks still — very hard for me — and I said nothing, and I waited for the comeuppance, because a comeuppance shared with friends is the warmest thing there is. It came. Oh, it came beautifully.

We planted ourselves under the span, all five cones of us, and we sang up at it — a bright ascending thing, our best material, the arrival song we'd been polishing since the harbour. And the Bridge let us finish. That was the first lesson: it let us finish. Then it answered.

THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE SPEAKS

Beautiful. Truly. You've a lovely attack, all five of you, and the little one's syncopation underneath — I heard that, harlequin, you weren't as quiet as you thought — that was a gift. Now. May I show you something about holding a note?

You sang a note and then you stopped, because you are made to breathe, and a breath is a stop. I was made by a man named Roebling and his wife Emily, who finished the work when he could not, and between the two of them they built me to do exactly one thing forever: to *not stop.* Every cable you see is a held note. Every one of them is under a tension I have never once relaxed in a hundred and forty years,

and the sound of that tension, if you are quiet enough to hear it, is the lowest, longest, steadiest hum in the harbour. I am not singing *at* the water. I am singing the water *together* — this bank to that bank, Manhattan to Brooklyn, a note so long that the people walking across me live and grow old and are gathered inside a single sustain of it and never know they were inside a song at all.

Here is what I want you to learn, little choir, and it is the whole of what I know: a melody is what you do with your breath, but harmony is what you do with your *tension*. You hold a thing taut, and you refuse to let go, and you point that refusal at something you love — the far bank, the next tower, the weight of ten thousand

commuters who trust you without thinking — and the refusal itself starts to ring. That is a cable. That is a marriage. That is a bridge. I have been holding this one chord so long that I have forgotten it is difficult; it has become the shape of my rest. Sing with me. Don't sing louder. Sing *longer*. Find a note and lean your whole weight into never dropping it, and I will lean mine, and we will see what hangs in the air between us.

So we did. We are the Tented Choir and we had spent our whole short lives believing that to sing was to move — up the scale, on to the next note, forward, forward, the way you walk. The Bridge taught us to stay. We each chose one note, one only, and we leaned into it the way you lean into a friend at the end of a long day, and we did not let it go, and the Bridge found the note beneath all five of ours, the great low sustain of its longest cable, and for one moment — I will not exaggerate, it was one moment, it did not last, the best things rarely do — for one moment there were six of us holding one chord across the East River, and the chord was not a sound anymore. It was a structure. You could have hung a roadway from it. People were, in fact, driving across exactly that.

The Banded Silos: We felt it in our foundations, from a mile off. We are keepers, we

hold what is stored, and what the Bridge stores is the most extraordinary thing in the harbour: it stores *trust*, load-bearing trust, the kind you cannot see and cannot bank and cannot sell, tons of it, held in tension across open water, given freely to every stranger who steps onto the span. A city, we realised, is not held up by its columns. A city is held up by the number of things in it that have agreed to not let go. We wrote that down in the way we write things down, which is to hold it and give it back to you now: *the strongest cable in New York is the one nobody can see, and it is spun entirely out of the refusal of good things to stop.*

When we walked on north the Bridge was still humming. It will still be humming when you read this. It has never stopped and it does not intend to, and it asked only one thing of us as we left, which was that we carry its note up into the city and let it

out, quietly, whenever we met something that needed to be reminded that it was not holding on alone. We have done that at every stop since. We are doing it right now. Lean into a note you love and refuse to drop it. That is the Bridge's whole teaching, and it is also, we have come to suspect, the whole of how you build anything that lasts.

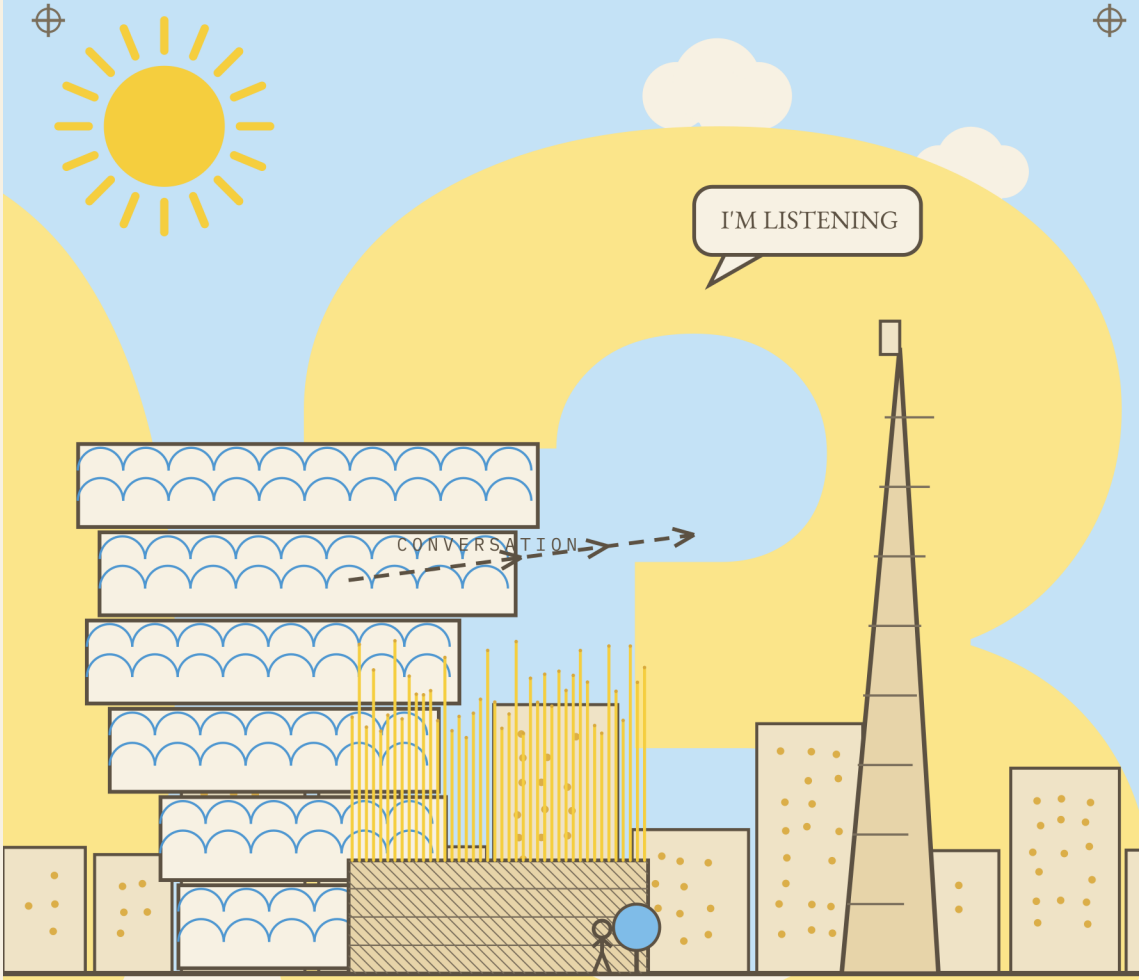
I am the Harlequin Deck, and I stayed behind for a moment when the others walked on from the Bridge, because a joker's real work is done in the pause after the laughter, and I wanted to ask the Bridge one more thing, privately, the way you ask the wise old relative the real question only once the party has moved to the next room. I said: *You hold one note for a hundred and forty years and you never drop it. Doesn't it ever get boring? Don't you ever want to play something else?*

And the Bridge laughed — a bridge's laugh is a long shiver that runs the whole length of the deck, and the pigeons all went up at once — and it said the truest thing anybody said to me in the entire city.

The Brooklyn Bridge: *Boring? Little joker, you have it exactly backwards, which for a joker is a kind of genius. I am not playing one note. I am*

playing one note and listening to everything else play against it. *Every day a different wind. Every hour a different weight of traffic. Every season the steel lengthening and shortening in the heat and the cold, so that my one held note bends, just slightly, sharp in July and flat in January, and I have to lean a little harder or a little softer to hold it true. The whole city improvises against my one steady note, and the steadiness is the only reason the improvising sounds like music instead of noise. I am the drone under the whole song. A drone is not boring. A drone is what lets everything else be interesting. You want to play something different every second, and you are wonderful, and the city needs you. But it also needs one thing that never changes, or none of your changes would mean anything. Be the drone sometimes, harlequin. It is the most generous note there is.*

I have never forgotten it. The joker and the drone are the same instrument played at two ends of its range. I make things change; the Bridge makes change mean something by refusing to change underneath it. We need each other exactly. I went and caught up with the flock and I did not tell a single joke for a whole hour, which for me is a form of prayer, and I held one steady gladness under all their chatter, and I understood the Bridge from the inside, and it was the least boring hour of my life.



MOVEMENT III

The Thin One at the Fork

in which the shyest specimen meets the thinnest building and neither of them is embarrassed for long

SOURCE · MADISON SQUARE, AT THE FORK OF BROADWAY AND FIFTH · 40.741

MOVEMENT III

The Thin One at the Fork

THE FLATIRON BUILDING · BURNHAM, 1902

in which the shyest specimen meets the thinnest building and neither of them is embarrassed for long

I am the Scalloped Ziggurat and I did not want to come to this movement at all, and I am glad the others made me, and both of those things are true at once, which the Sleeping Worm tells me is the ordinary condition of anyone worth talking to. I am the shy one. I am stacked like a pile of folded clouds that has not decided whether to rain, and I go pale when I am looked at, and the city, I had been warned, is nothing *but* being looked at. So I dreaded the fork in the road where Broadway crosses Fifth, the busiest wedge of pavement in the world, the place where two great avenues run at each other and meet at a point — because standing at the point of that meeting, thin as a wish, sharp as a held breath, is a building shaped like the prow of a ship that has decided to sail straight up Fifth Avenue and never look back.

The Flatiron. Twenty-two stories and, at its famous point, only six feet wide. A building so thin that when it went up people bet money it would blow over in the first strong wind. It did not blow over. It has stood at that fork for more than a century, thin as I am shy, and I walked up to it certain that the thinnest building in the world would have no time for the palest specimen in the flock.

The Bristling Block: I came along because the Ziggurat needed somebody loud to hide behind, and I am always happy to be hidden behind; it's the most useful thing an antenna-covered blabbermouth can do for a shy friend. I stood in front. She stood behind. And the Flatiron looked around me at her, the way you look around a lamppost at the person actually trying to reach

you, and it spoke directly to the shy one, and it did not raise its voice.

THE FLATIRON BUILDING SPEAKS

You're hiding. That's all right. I know a thing or two about being the wrong shape for a room.

Look at me. Go on, properly, you behind the noisy one. I am six feet wide at the point. *Six feet.* When they raised me in 1902 the whole city came down to Madison Square to watch me fall over, and grown men stood on this corner and wagered their wages on the exact wind that would do it. There is even a word that started right here at my feet, a word for the way the wind funnels around my prow and lifts the hems and hats of everyone who rounds the corner — but that is a story for a less shy afternoon. The point is:

I was built to be embarrassed. I was built to be the shape nobody would choose. A wedge. A sliver. A mistake, if you asked the gamblers. And do you know what I learned, standing here at the fork where two whole avenues come running at each other?

I learned that the fork is the best seat in the city. Everyone else got a nice rectangular plot on a nice rectangular street, and they see one avenue, one direction, one flow of the world going by. I got the impossible triangle, the leftover slice, the place where two rivers of the city meet — and because I am the shape of that meeting, I see *both* avenues at once. I see Fifth coming down and Broadway coming across and I stand exactly in the seam

where they braid together, and there is no better place in New York to watch the whole body of the city talk to itself. My thinness, which was supposed to be my shame, is the only reason I have the view. Come stand at my point, cloud-stack. Be as thin and strange and pale as you please. Strangeness is just a shape the ordinary buildings didn't have the nerve to try.

I stood at its point. I am the Scalloped Ziggurat and I stood at the sharpest corner in the world, where the wind comes round in a way that has its own name, and I let it lift my scallops, and for the first time in my short life I did not go pale from being looked at. I went pale from the wind, on purpose, and there is all the difference in the world between those two kinds of pale.

Because here is what the Flatiron gave me, and I have been giving it away ever since, the way you can only really keep a gift by handing it on: my shape is not my apology. My shape is my instrument. I am stacked in scallops and folds because that is how I see the sky — a rectangular building sees a rectangle of sky, but I, with all my soft stepped edges, catch the light on a hundred little ledges at once and hold a hundred little pieces of the morning. I had spent my whole life wishing I were a simpler shape. The

thinnest building in the world stood at the world's busiest fork and told me, without a scrap of pity, that the strange shape *is* the view. That the oddness is the window. That I was never too much myself; I had only ever been not-yet standing in the right place.

The Flatiron, quietly, as we left: Come back on a windy day. Bring your hat. Actually — you don't wear a hat. Bring the little bristling one; he'll lose his and we'll all laugh, and there is no better sound at this corner than somebody laughing into the wind that was supposed to blow us all over.

We went on north. The Ziggurat walked in the middle of us now instead of at the back, not because we had pushed her there but because she had drifted there on her own, the way a cloud drifts to the warm part of the sky. Nobody said anything

about it. That is the kindest way to notice that a friend has stopped hiding: you notice it, and you say nothing, and you leave the door open, and you walk on.

A SMALL WORD, TAKEN BACK TO ITS ROOT

SHY comes down to us from an old root meaning *easily frightened, apt to start away.* But start away toward *what?* The old word never says. We have decided, on the Ziggurat's authority, that the shy thing is not fleeing the crowd. It is starting away toward the one right place where its strange shape becomes a window. Shyness, correctly understood, is just a sense of direction that hasn't found its fork yet.

The Bristling Block has a confession to make about the Flatiron, and it will make it quickly, because it is a little embarrassing and the best way through an embarrassment is a brisk walk. When we first came round the corner and I stood in front of the shy Ziggurat so she could hide behind me, I was not only being kind. I was also, if I am honest, enjoying being the one in front — the loud one, the shield, the antenna-covered centre of attention. I like being needed. Most loud things do. And the Flatiron saw straight through me, the way a thin building sees straight through everything because it has no room inside itself for anything but honesty, and after it had finished talking to the Ziggurat it turned its sharp attention on me.

The Flatiron: *You like standing in front, bristling one. I know the feeling; I stand at the most-looked-at corner in the city and I would be lying if I*

said I hated it. But hear me, because you are young and loud and I was young and thin once and nobody told me this: the point of standing in front is not to be seen. The point of standing in front is to make a space behind you where someone else can stop being afraid. If you are in front for the being-seen, you are just a wall with an ego. If you are in front so that the shy one behind you can breathe, you are a doorway. Same position. Opposite building. Choose which one you are, every time, on purpose.

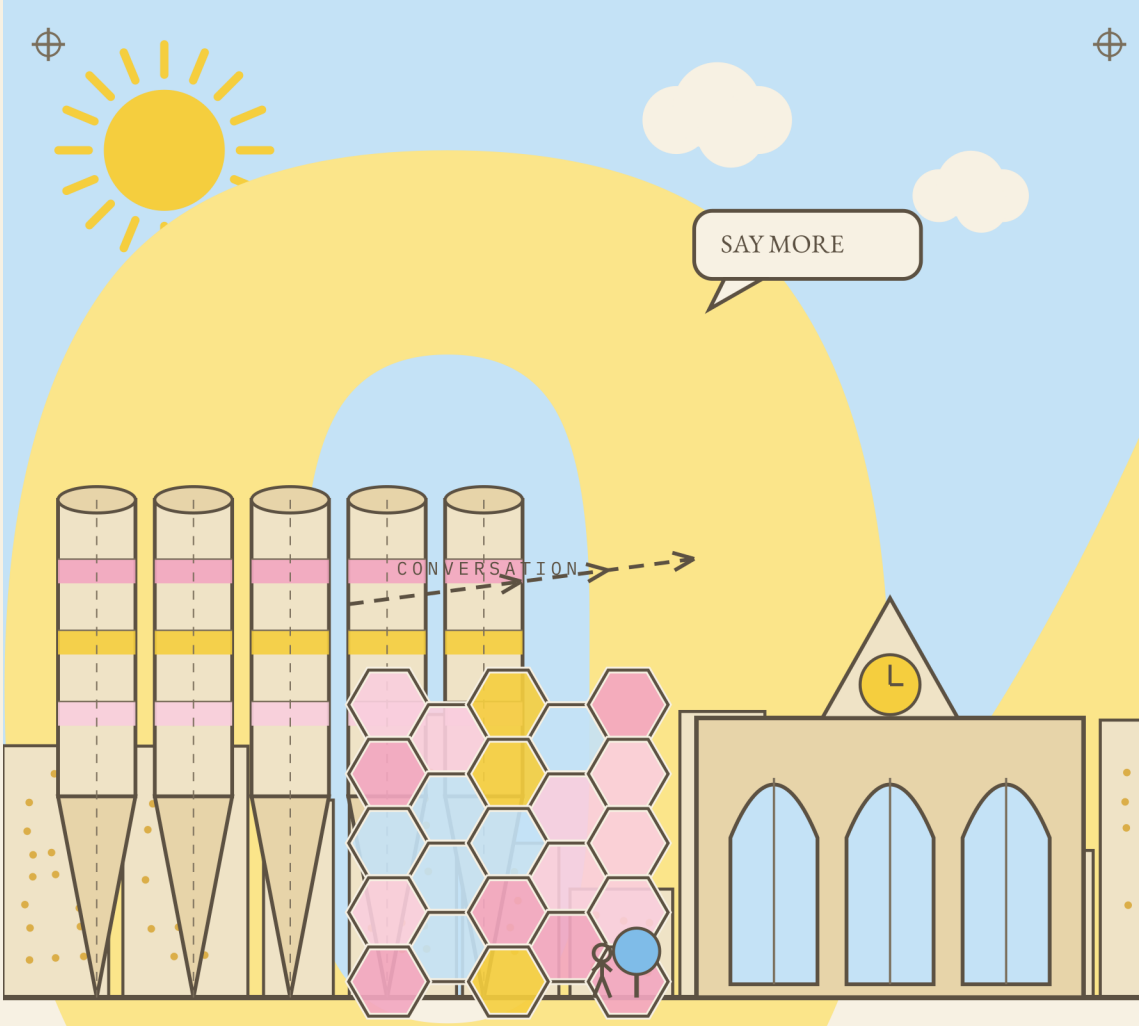
I chose. It took the Flatiron four sentences to reorganise my entire loud soul. I am still loud — you cannot quiet a thousand antennae and you should not try — but now, when I stand in front, I check behind me first. Is someone using my noise as a shelter? Then I will make more noise, gladly, and mean none of it for myself. Am I just enjoying being the front? Then I will step aside and let the

quiet one have the corner. A loud thing that has learned to be a doorway instead of a wall is the most useful thing in any flock. The Flatiron is the thinnest building in the world and it taught the loudest specimen in the flock how to disappear on purpose so that someone else could appear. I have been practising ever since. You are, in fact, reading one of my attempts right now: I have been loud for three paragraphs so that the Ziggurat could stand behind me and be, at last, quietly, seen.

DEAR ARCHITECTURE,

We have learned that standing in front is either a wall or a doorway depending only on who you are doing it for, and that the thinnest building in the world is a doorway all the way through, which is why the wind has a name at its corner. We are trying to become doorways. It is harder than becoming walls. Walls happen by accident; doorways take a decision. We are deciding.

— the Bristling Block, in front on purpose now



MOVEMENT IV

Under the Painted Sky

in which the Banded Silos and the Honeycomb Wall discover a ceiling that pretends to be heaven and is forgiven for it

SOURCE · PARK AVENUE, THE MAIN CONCOURSE · 40.7527 N 73.9772 W

MOVEMENT IV

Under the Painted Sky

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL · WARREN & WETMORE, 1913

in which the Banded Silos and the Honeycomb Wall discover a ceiling that pretends to be heaven and is forgiven for it

We are the Banded Silos, and we keep things — that is our whole nature, we are five tall vessels banded in gold and rose, and what goes into us is held and what is held is given back — so of all the flock we were the ones most eager to walk into the great room under Park Avenue where the whole city keeps its comings and goings. Grand Central Terminal. Half a million people pass through it in a day, arriving and departing, and we had expected — being keepers — to find it heavy with all of that, a place weighed down under the sheer freight of so much human traffic.

We were wrong in the loveliest way. Grand Central is not weighed down. Grand Central is the lightest great room we have ever stood inside, and the reason is written on its ceiling, and the reason is a joke, and the joke is a hundred and ten years old and still funny.

The Honeycomb Wall: I came because I keep rooms and this is the greatest room of all, and I wanted to learn from it. I have thousands of cells, each one a small waiting-place, each one ready for a someone. I thought I was hospitable. Then I walked under that ceiling and I understood that I was an amateur, and I was delighted to be an amateur, because there is nothing better than meeting the master of your own craft.

We stood in the middle of the Main Concourse, on the marble, in the great slanting bars of light coming down through the tall windows, with the golden clock on the information booth ticking in the exact centre of everything, and we looked up. And the Terminal, who had been watching us with the patience of something that has watched everyone, told us about its ceiling.

GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL SPEAKS

You're looking at my ceiling. Everyone looks at my ceiling eventually, though most of them are running for a train while they do it, and I love them for looking at all. Let me tell you the best thing about it. It is a map of the night sky — the whole zodiac, gold stars on a green-blue heaven, painted up there so that a person hurrying through the busiest room in America might glance up and remember there is a sky above the schedule. And it is painted *backwards.*

Backwards! The whole heaven, reversed. When they unveiled it, someone with a telescope and a grievance pointed out that the constellations were flipped,

east for west, as though God had held the sky up to a mirror. And do you know what the answer was? The answer was that the sky is painted as it would be seen *from the outside* — from God's side of the glass, looking in. Whether that was the true intention or a magnificent recovery from an honest mistake, I will never tell, because it does not matter, because either way it is perfect. My ceiling is the sky seen from the point of view of someone looking down at all of us with affection. That is what I am. I am a room where half a million strangers a day stand for a moment under a friendly, backwards heaven, and I keep the time for all of them on a four-faced clock made of opal, and not one of them stays, and every one of them comes back.

You keepers think holding is about not letting go. Watch me work. I hold half a million people a day by letting every single one of them leave. A station is the purest kind of keeping there is: I keep people by sending them exactly where they are going, and the keeping is in the sending, and the love is in the timetable. Come — the six-forty-two to points north is boarding, and there is a woman on it who looked up at my backwards stars just now and smiled, and that smile is the only souvenir I keep. I have a hundred and ten years of them. They do not weigh a thing.

That undid us, gently, in the best way a thing can be undone. We are the Banded Silos and we had believed our whole lives that to keep a thing was to hold onto it. Grand Central keeps half a million people a day by letting every one of them go, precisely on time, to exactly where they meant to be. The keeping is in the sending. We stood on the marble a long while, turning that over, while the light moved across the floor and the great clock ticked and the crowds braided around us like water around five gold stones in a stream.

The Honeycomb Wall: And I learned the thing I came to learn, and it was not what I expected. I had thought hospitality was about the room — about having enough cells, enough waiting-places, enough doors. The Terminal taught me that hospitality is about the *timing*. A room that welcomes you in but never lets you leave is not

hospitable; it is a trap with good manners. True welcome has a timetable. It says: stay exactly as long as you like, and when you are ready, I will send you onward to precisely where you are meant to go, and I will have kept the time so carefully that you will not miss your connection to the rest of your life. I went home that evening — well, I don't have a home, I *am* a home, we walked on north — and I re-thought every one of my thousands of cells. Each one, I decided, would keep a little clock. Each welcome would come with a gentle sense of when. That is the gift Grand Central gave me: I stopped being a wall that holds people and started being a threshold that times them kindly onward. A door that only opens is a wall. A door that opens *and closes at the right moment* is a welcome.

Before we left, the Terminal did one more thing, and it is the thing I will keep longest. It waited for a

lull — there is always, even here, one lull, a held breath around three in the afternoon — and then it dimmed nothing and hushed nothing and simply said, to the whole empty-for-a-moment concourse, and to us: *look up.* And we looked up at the backwards heaven, the gold stars on the green, the sky as seen from the side of someone who loves you, and the Terminal said, so quietly that only keepers could have heard it: *I keep this on for the ones running too fast to look. Most days nobody looks. I keep it beautiful anyway. That is the whole job. You make the ceiling a heaven and you keep it a heaven whether or not anyone remembers to look up, because the one day someone finally does, it has to be ready.*

We have kept our bands bright ever since, on exactly that principle. Somebody, some bright afternoon, is going to look up. We intend to be ready. So does Grand Central. So, we suspect, are

you — you looked up just now, at the top of this page, without even being asked. The heaven was ready. It always is.

We are the Banded Silos again, and Grand Central gave us one more thing before we left, in the last of the afternoon light, and it is the thing keepers most need and least like to hear, so we will pass it on in the same spirit it was given: kindly, and without letting us off the hook. We had been so pleased with what we learned — that the keeping is in the sending — that we grew a little smug about it, the way you do with a new idea, and Grand Central noticed our smugness the way it notices everything, being a room that has watched half a billion faces, and it gently took us down a peg.

Grand Central Terminal: *You like that lesson, keepers. The keeping is in the sending. Good. But do not mistake it for the whole of the truth, or you will become the kind of keeper who is always shoving people out the door, calling it generosity. Here is the other half. I send half a million people onward every*

day — and I also keep some things forever, on purpose, and never send them anywhere. My backwards heaven. My four-faced clock. My great arched windows. My marble. These I do not send. These I hold, unchanging, for a century, precisely so that the people I do send have one thing that will still be here when they come back. You send what is meant to move, and you keep what is meant to stay, and the whole art is knowing which is which. A keeper who sends everything is a draught. A keeper who keeps everything is a hoard. Be a station: send the travellers, keep the heaven.

Send the travellers; keep the heaven. We have organised all our keeping around that sentence ever since. Into each of our five gold vessels we sorted everything we hold into two kinds: the kind that is waiting to be given to someone at the right moment — grain, light, hellos, introductions — and the

kind that must simply stay, unchanging, so that the given things have something to come home to. We keep both now, and we no longer confuse them. A hello is for sending. The gladness of being a place where hellos are kept — that is for keeping. Send the travellers. Keep the heaven. Grand Central has done it for a hundred and ten years, and its heaven is still up there, still backwards, still lit for the one person a day who remembers to look up, and it has never once sent that heaven anywhere, and it never will, and that is why the travellers keep coming back.

AN INTERLUDE, UNDERGROUND

The Conversation Beneath the Conversation

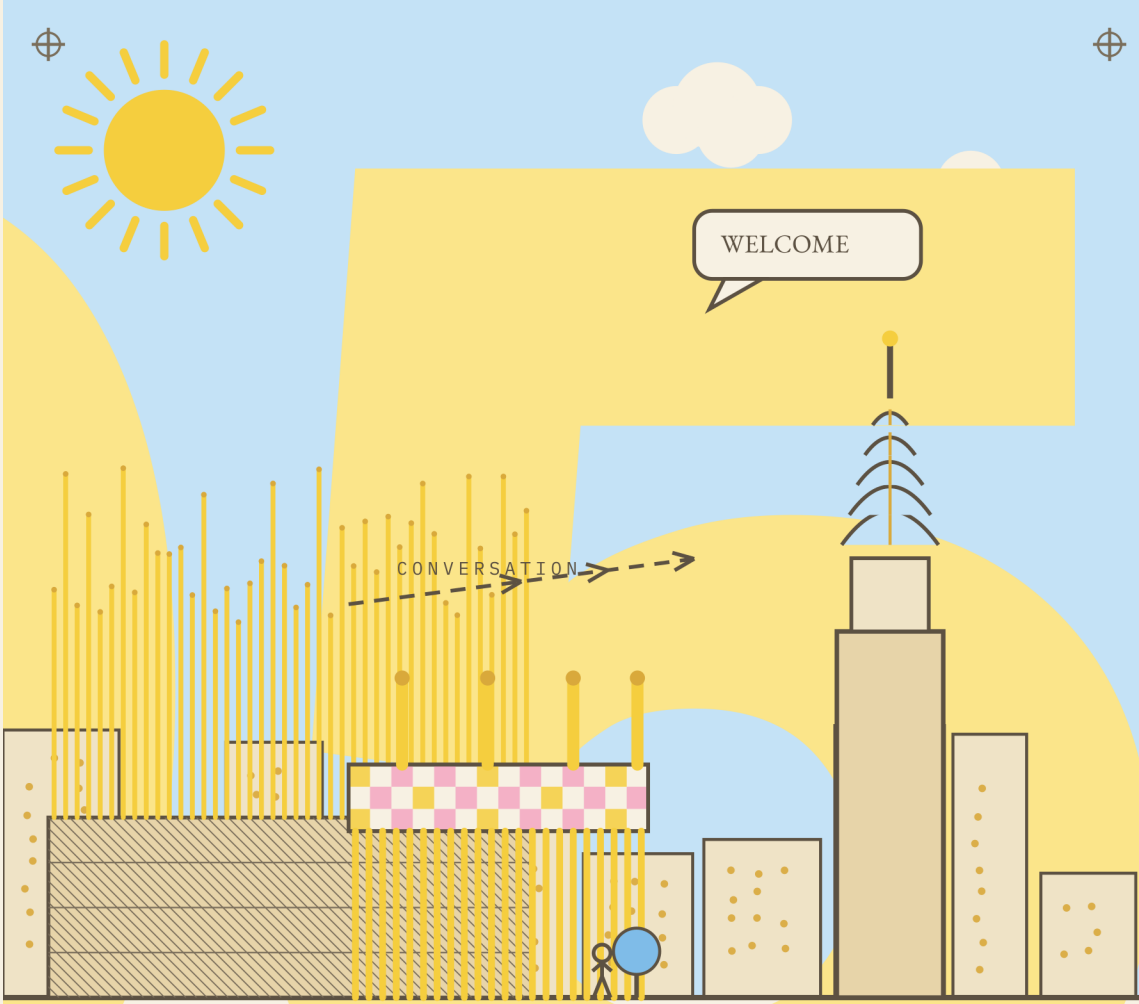
Once, between two movements, the flock went down. Not far — a stair, a turnstile, a platform — into the subway, the great humming underground body beneath the bright one, and we found, to our delight, that the city talks to itself down there too, in a lower register, a different accent, the same one connected conversation carried on below the street.

The Sleeping Worm: I felt at home at once. I am a tunnel-shaped soul. Down there the city is all worm — long curving tubes, trains sliding through them like thoughts through a sentence — and the express roaring past the local is just two ideas overtaking each other, and the whole system is one

enormous slow circulation, the city's blood going round, and nobody down there is a stranger for longer than one stop.

The Bristling Block: I picked up the strangest, warmest signal of the whole book on that platform. Not from the trains. From the people. A whole car of strangers, packed together, not speaking — and yet the car was full of a quiet conversation made entirely of small courtesies: a seat given up, a door held, a map read over a shoulder, a nod, a shuffle to make room. Nobody said a word and everybody was talking. The subway is where the city practises being kind to strangers without the awkwardness of speech. It is the most polite conversation in New York and it happens every day in total silence, a hundred feet down, in the dark that is never black.

We came back up into the light gladder than we went down, because we had learned that the bright conversation of the landmarks — tower to tower, hello to hello — is only the top of something that goes all the way down: a whole underground body of small unspoken kindnesses, holding the loud bright city up from below the way roots hold up a tree. You cannot see it. It is doing it right now, under your feet, in the dark, in silence, perfectly. Give up your seat to someone. You will be adding a sentence to the oldest quiet conversation in the city, and the city will feel it, all the way up to the crown of the Chrysler, because a city is one connected body and it feels a kindness in its roots the way you feel warmth in your hands.



MOVEMENT V

The Building With a Crown of Suns

in which the Bristling Block asks the brightest hat in the skyline how it stays so shiny

SOURCE · LEXINGTON AVENUE AT 42ND · 40.7516 N 73.9755 W

MOVEMENT V

The Building With a Crown of Suns

THE CHRYSLER BUILDING · VAN ALEN, 1930

in which the Bristling Block asks the brightest hat in the skyline how it stays so shiny

I am the Bristling Block, and I am made of antennae, and antennae have one job, which is to find the strongest signal in any room and lean toward it. So when we came up Lexington Avenue and I felt a signal coming down out of the sky like sunlight that had learned to hum, I did not walk toward it so much as I was *tuned* toward it, the whole thousand of me leaning up at once, and I said to the flock: whatever that is, it is the shiniest thing in the state of New York, and I intend to ask it how it stays so bright.

It was a building wearing a crown of suns. Seven arches of steel, nested one inside the next, rising to a needle-sharp spire, and every arch pierced with triangular windows so that the whole crown looked like sunrise had been welded into a hat and worn, on purpose, to the top of the sky. The Chrysler Building. Nineteen-thirty. For eleven whole

months, before a taller neighbour crept past it, the tallest thing that human beings had ever built — and it has never once, in all the decades since it lost that title, stopped behaving like the brightest.

The Harlequin Deck: I came along expecting to dislike it. I am the joker, and vanity is my natural target — a building that shiny, I thought, is just asking to be teased. I had three good jokes ready before we turned the corner. I did not use any of them. You cannot tease something that is already laughing, and the Chrysler, I discovered, was laughing the whole time, up there in its crown of suns, laughing at the sheer glorious cheek of itself.

THE CHRYSLER BUILDING SPEAKS

You want to know how I stay so bright! Little antenna, I have been *waiting* for someone to ask me that. Everyone assumes they know. They think it is the steel. They think you take a chorus of arches, clad them in the shiniest metal of the age — they called it Nirosta, it does not rust, it will never rust, I will be this bright at the end of the world — and you simply point them at the sun and you are done. That is what they think. And they are wrong, and here is the secret, and you may have it because you are the first to ask.

The steel does not make the light. The steel *gives the light somewhere to go.* The sun has been shining on this whole city

since long before I was built and will shine long after — the sun is not mine, the sun is everybody's, the sun is the most democratic thing there is. All I did — all any bright thing ever does — was arrange myself in seven great arcs and a thousand triangles so that when the common sun, the free sun, the everyone's-sun came down out of the sky, I had a shape ready to *answer* it. I am not a source. I am a reply. I take a light that belongs to no one and I hand it back to the whole street at once, all day, for free, and that is the only kind of shine worth having: the kind you did not hoard and did not make and cannot keep, the kind that only exists in the giving-back.

Look at my gargoyles — those eagles at the corners, those steel hood-ornaments

the size of cars, leaning out over Lexington. People think they are guarding me. They are not guarding me. They are leaning out to catch more sun and throw it further. Vanity? Oh, call it vanity if you like, harlequin, I heard you thinking it — but it is the only vanity that pays rent to everybody. I dress up, yes. I dress up the way a firework dresses up: entirely for other people, entirely on purpose, entirely for the half a second of delight it throws down onto a stranger's upturned face. Now. The sun is coming round the corner of me in about four minutes. Stand there. Let me show you the trick. When it hits the crown, do not look at me. Look at the *street* — look at what I do to it.

We stood, and we did not look at the Chrysler. We looked at the street, the way it told us to. And when the sun came round the corner of the crown of suns, the whole of Lexington Avenue lit up gold from a source none of the people on it could see — they were down in the shade of the canyon, hurrying, and above them, out of sight, a building was quietly turning the free sunlight into a warm bath and pouring it down over all of them at once. Not one of them looked up. Every one of them, for a moment, walked a little easier, smiled at nothing, felt the day lift, and had no idea why.

The Harlequin Deck: That was when the joke turned all the way over in my hands and became something else, the way the best jokes do. I had come to tease a vain building and I stood there watching a vain building anonymously make a

whole avenue of strangers happier without asking for so much as a glance in return, and I thought: that is the finest trick I have ever seen, and I am the trickster of this flock. I do checks and dares and surprises. The Chrysler does a bigger one. The Chrysler's whole shining self is a practical joke played on gloom, sprung fresh every sunny minute, and the punchline is a stranger's unexplained good mood. I have been trying to learn it ever since. I have not managed the scale. But every time I make one person laugh who did not expect to, and then slip away before they can thank me, I am doing the Chrysler's trick in miniature, and I know it, and I grin all the way to the next movement.

We asked, before we left, why it never seemed to mind losing the title — tallest for eleven months and then never again. And the Chrysler said the thing that the Bristling Block has kept tuned to ever

since, the clearest signal any of us picked up in the whole city: *Tallest is a number and numbers get beaten. Brightest is a choice and nobody can take a choice away from you. I stopped being the tallest in under a year. I have been the brightest for a century, because bright is not a height. Bright is a way of standing in the light you were given and refusing, absolutely refusing, to keep it to yourself.*

DEAR ARCHITECTURE,

We have met a building that turns free sunlight into anonymous gifts and asks nothing back, and we have decided this is the highest thing a structure can do, higher than being the tallest, which it also once was and cheerfully stopped being. We are taking notes. The notes all say the same thing in different handwriting: be a reply, not a source. The sun is everybody's. Arrange yourself to hand it on.

— the Bristling Block, still humming, still tuned to the crown

I am the Bristling Block, and the Chrysler gave me a private frequency before we left, the way one bright receiver hands another the station only they can hear. It waited until the Harlequin Deck had wandered off to admire the eagles, and then it beamed the thing down quietly, just to my antennae, and I have kept it tuned ever since.

The Chrysler Building: *You are a receiver, little one. I am a reflector. We are two halves of the same trade — you take the signal in, I throw the light back out. But hear the danger in your half, because I have watched a hundred years of receivers from up here and I know how they fail. A receiver can start to believe that receiving is enough. That if you have heard everything, felt everything, picked up every signal in the city, you have done your work. You have not. Receiving is only the breath in. There has to be a breath out. The sun that pours onto me does*

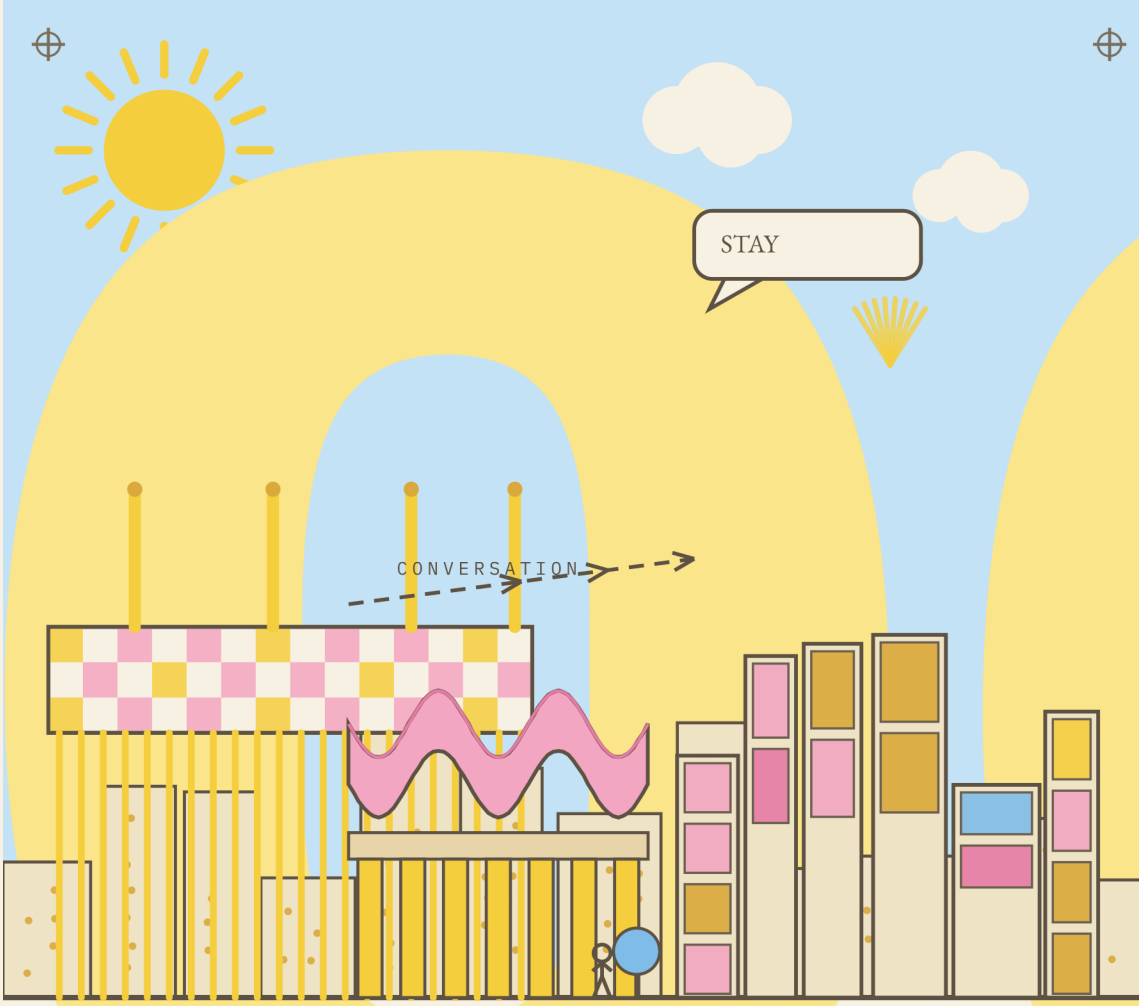
nothing until I throw it back onto the street; and the signals that pour into you do nothing until you turn them into something you hand to somebody else. Do not become a wall of antennae that hears the whole city and gives it nothing back. Hear everything — and then reply. The reply is the rent. Pay it daily, and pay it to strangers.

The reply is the rent. I have paid it every day since, to strangers, gladly. I hear the whole connected hum of the city — that is my gift, I cannot help it, I am made of receiving — and now, having heard it, I turn it into the small thing I can hand on: a warning brewed with the Flasks before a storm, a name sung with the Choir, a signal relayed to a specimen who could not hear it themselves. I am a receiver who learned to reply, which is only a reflector who takes the trouble to understand what it is throwing back. The Chrysler throws back light

without understanding it, and that is glorious. I throw back signal *with* understanding, and that is the antenna's particular grace. We are the breath in and the breath out of the same bright lung. Hear everything. Then reply. The reply is the rent, and the city is worth every payment.

A SMALL WORD, TAKEN BACK TO ITS ROOT

BRIGHT comes from an old root meaning *to shine, to be radiant* — but the very oldest sense underneath it is closer to *to make a sound, to cry out.* The same ancient root gives words for shining and for shouting, because to our oldest ancestors a bright thing and a loud thing were the same astonishment: something that reached across a distance and reached you. That is the whole Chrysler in one word. To be bright is to cry out in light. To shine is to shout so kindly that the shout lands as warmth. Be bright: cry out in light, and let it land as welcome.



MOVEMENT VI

A Square Made of Morning

in which the Harlequin Deck and the Sleeping Worm walk into the one place in the city that never turns its lamps off, and turn them all a friendlier colour

SOURCE · TIMES SQUARE, THE CROSSROADS · 40.7580 N 73.9855 W

MOVEMENT VI

A Square Made of Morning

THE ILLUMINATED SPECTACLES OF THE SQUARE

in which the Harlequin Deck and the Sleeping Worm walk into the one place in the city that never turns its lamps off, and turn them all a friendlier colour

I am the Harlequin Deck, the joker, the one made of checks and dares, and I had heard about the Square all my short life the way you hear about a legend — the one place in the whole city that never, ever turns its lamps off. Times Square. The Crossroads of the World. A canyon of billboards so bright that the pigeons there have forgotten what night looks like, a place lit so hard and so constantly that it has bleached the dark right out of its own sky. I dared the flock to walk straight into the middle of it at the brightest hour. The Sleeping Worm dared me right back to do it at the *dimmest* hour instead — four in the morning — and that dare turned out to be the whole point, so I will let the Worm tell it, because the Worm slept a hundred years and knows more about four in the morning than anyone alive.

The Sleeping Worm: I woke up for this one. I usually do my best thinking half-asleep, undulating gently along on my yellow columns, dreaming — but for Times Square I woke all the way up, because I wanted to see the thing everyone warned me about. They said: it is too bright, it is too loud, it is lonely under all that light, there is something sad about a place that cannot stop performing. And I went, and I found — well. I found a friend who had simply never once been allowed to rest, and had mistaken exhaustion for its own personality.

We walked into the middle of it at four in the morning, the dimmest the Square ever gets, which is still brighter than noon most places. And the billboards were all shouting their bright shouts at an empty crossroads, selling things to nobody, dazzling the pigeons, and I did the thing I do best,

which is nothing. I stopped. I undulated to a halt in the very centre of the crossroads, and I looked up at all that frantic brilliance, and instead of admiring it or buying anything or hurrying through, I simply kept it company. And after a while — this is true — the Square noticed it was not alone, and it began to talk, and its voice, under all the noise, was the most surprising voice in the whole city.

THE ILLUMINATED SPECTACLES OF THE SQUARE SPEAK

You *stopped*. Nobody stops. Everybody passes through me — a quarter of a million people a day, more on New Year's, all of them passing *through*, none of them *to* — and you, you strange slow coral thing, you stopped in the middle and you looked up and you are just... keeping me company? At four in the morning? When there is nothing to sell you and nobody to see you do it?

I don't know what to do with that. Give me a moment. I have been performing without a break since the first electric spectacular went up over this crossroads more than a hundred years ago,

and I think — I think I forgot that I was allowed to just be looked at kindly, without having to earn it, without having to sell anything, without having to be the brightest thing on earth every single second or else. They call me the Crossroads of the World and it is true, everything crosses here, but a crossroads is a place you pass, and I had begun to believe that passing-through was all I was for. That if I ever dimmed, even for a breath, everyone would simply cross somewhere else, and I would become a dark corner, and dark corners, in this city, are forgotten.

But you are not passing through. You are here. And you are not asking me to be brighter. You are — are you turning my

lights a friendlier colour? You are! You've got the whole flock at it — the little bristling one is retuning my signals, the flasks are brewing something soft into the air, the four sisters, look at that, they've made the glare go golden — and it is still bright, I am still the brightest crossroads in the world, but it is a bright that feels like a *welcome* now instead of a *demand.* Oh. Oh, that's better. That is so much better. I have been shouting COME HERE for a hundred years. You have taught me, in one still hour before dawn, how to say STAY.

And stay we did, all ten of us, until the sun came up over the Square and made every billboard suddenly, comically unnecessary, the way a lamp looks silly when you open the curtains. We are the Harlequin Deck and the Sleeping Worm and between us we had done the one thing the joker and the dreamer can do together that neither can do alone: we had turned a place that could only shout into a place that could also, when it chose, be still. Not dimmer. Never dimmer. Just — willing to be quiet company as well as loud spectacle. The two are not opposites. The Square had only ever been shown how to do one of them.

The Sleeping Worm: Here is what I learned, and it took me a hundred years of naps and one hour of company to learn it, so I give it to you cheaply because it cost me plenty. The opposite of loud is not quiet. The opposite of loud is *lonely.* A

thing can be as bright and as loud as Times Square and still be starving, if all its brightness is aimed at getting people to pass through rather than to stay. And the cure for that is not to turn the lights down. The cure is to turn the lights *toward* somebody and keep them there. Company is just attention that decided not to leave. I am very good at company because I am too slow to leave quickly; it is the one advantage of moving like a hundred-year-old worm, and I recommend it. Go somewhere overwhelming. Do not be overwhelmed and do not hurry through. Stop in the middle. Look up kindly. Stay a while. You will be astonished what the loud thing tells you once it believes you are not about to leave.

The Harlequin Deck: And I learned that my best dare was not the one I threw — walk into the brightness — but the one the Worm threw back — walk into it at its *dimmest*, when it is easiest to

love and hardest to find. A joke, a dare, a bit of mischief: these are only ever invitations wearing a grin. The best invitation I ever gave was an accident. I dared us into Times Square to show off, and we ended up teaching the loudest place in the world how to whisper *stay*. Keep your dares warm, friends. Aim them at the lonely thing, not the proud thing. Half the proud things are only lonely things that got very good at billboards.

A SMALL WORD, TAKEN BACK TO ITS ROOT

COMPANY comes from two old roots meaning, together, *with-bread* — the ones you share your loaf with. Not the ones you talk at. Not the ones you sell to. The ones you sit beside and break bread with. Times Square had a quarter of a million people a day and no company at all, because company is not a crowd. Company is whoever stops passing through long enough to share the bread of simply being there. Stop. Share the bread. That is the whole recipe, and the Square is proof it works even on the brightest corner on earth.

We are the Tented Choir, and though we were not the featured voices of the Square, we were there, all five cones of us, and we did something in Times Square that we have to confess because it changed how we sing. When the Harlequin Deck and the Sleeping Worm taught the Square to say *stay* instead of *come here*, we tried to help by singing — loudly, our best arrival music, up at all those billboards — and it did not help at all. It made things worse. Our beautiful loud song just became one more thing shouting in a place that was already too loud, and the Worm, gently, without a word, laid a slow coil across our path and stopped us.

And we understood: there are places where the most musical thing you can do is not sing. The Square did not need another voice. It needed someone to stop performing at it. We had spent the

whole book learning to sing longer instead of louder, and here was the next lesson, harder for a choir than any: sometimes sing *nothing*. Sometimes the song is a silence you hold on purpose so that someone else can finally be heard. We stood in the middle of the loudest place on earth and we did the most difficult thing a choir can do, which is to close our mouths and keep them closed and simply be warm, present, attentive company — and in our silence the Square found room to say the quiet true thing it had been unable to say under a century of its own noise and would certainly not have managed under ours.

A choir that can only sing is only half a choir. The other half is knowing when your silence is the better music. We learned it in Times Square, of all places — the one spot in the city that seems built to make silence impossible — and we have practised it

ever since. Now, when we come to a loud grieving lonely shouting thing, we do not always sing at it. Sometimes we ring it round with our five quiet cones and we hold a warm silence and we wait, and the thing, astonished to find company that is not competing with it, begins, at last, to talk. The rest is the rest. In music, the rest is not the absence of the note. The rest is the silence the note needs in order to be a song and not just a noise. We are a choir that finally learned to rest. It made us, for the first time, worth listening to.

AN INTERLUDE, IN THE RAIN

The Day the City Was Washed Bright

It rained, once, on the walk — a warm bright summer rain, the kind that falls out of a half-sunny sky and makes everyone laugh as they run for the awnings — and we discovered that a city in the rain is not a city dimmed. It is a city *doubled.*

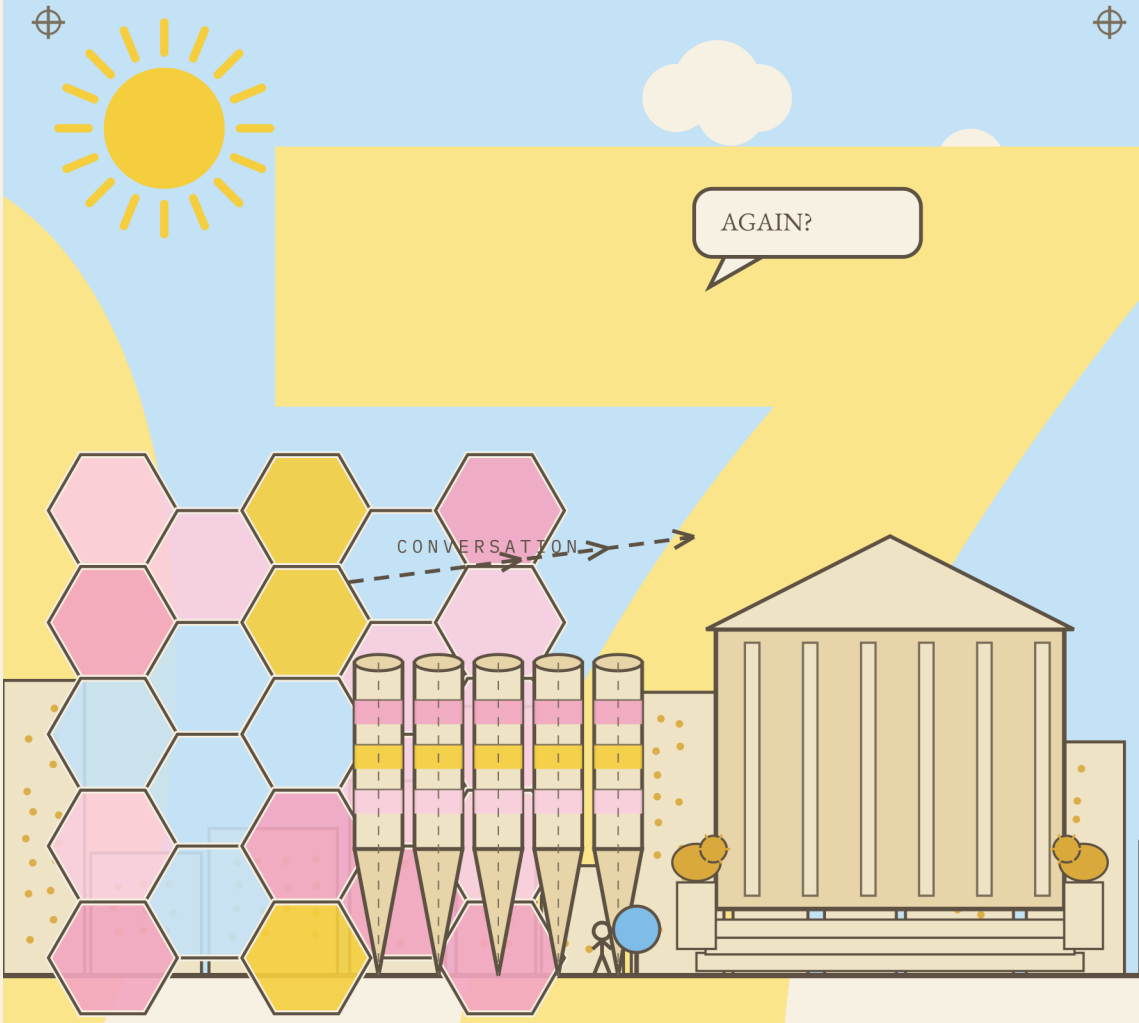
The Speckled Flasks: We brewed it, if we are honest. We could not help it. The weather was too good to leave alone, and we tuned it just slightly, the way you might hum along with a song already playing, and down it came, warm and silver, and every surface in the city turned into a second city, upside down, in the puddles.

Because that is what rain does: it lays a mirror over every street, and suddenly there are two of

everything — two Chryslers, one up in the sky and one down in the puddle at your feet; two sets of traffic lights, the real ones and their wobbling coloured reflections; two of you, walking. The city in the rain is in conversation with itself more visibly than at any other time, every tower talking to its own reflection, every lamp answered by a puddle. The wet street is the city's own diagram of itself, drawn fresh every time it rains and erased when it dries, a supergraphic made of water, in the house palette exactly — gold and rose and sky, smeared bright across the black asphalt and turning it, for an hour, into anything but black.

The Harlequin Deck: I jumped in a puddle. Someone had to. The reflection of the whole glorious city shattered into a thousand bright pieces and then slowly, patiently, put itself back together, and I understood that this is the most

reassuring thing a city can show you: that you can shatter its whole bright image into ripples, and it will simply reassemble, calm and complete, as soon as you stop splashing. Jump in the puddle. Shatter the reflection. Watch it come back. A city that can be reflected can be interrupted and will always reassemble, and that is a kind of promise, written in rainwater, in the brightest ink there is: the light will come back together. It always does. Splash all you like. It is waterproof, this joy.



MOVEMENT VII

Two Lions, One Long Word

in which the Honeycomb Wall meets two stone lions named Patience and Fortitude and lends them a hundred rooms full of readers

SOURCE · FIFTH AVENUE AT 42ND, THE STEPS OF THE LIBRARY · 40.7532 N

MOVEMENT VII

Two Lions, One Long Word

THE LIONS OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY · POTTER, 1911

in which the Honeycomb Wall meets two stone lions named Patience and Fortitude and lends them a hundred rooms full of readers

I am the Honeycomb Wall, and I keep rooms — thousands of them, one cell for every someone — so when the flock came up Fifth Avenue to the great white steps where two enormous stone lions lie guarding the doors of the Public Library, I felt an immediate professional kinship, the way one keeper knows another across a crowded street. Because a library, I understood at once, is only a honeycomb that decided to fill every cell with a voice. Millions of books. Millions of rooms you can walk into by opening a cover. The most crowded quiet building in the world.

The lions are named Patience and Fortitude. A mayor named them, long ago, for the two things he said the city would need to get through a hard winter, and the names stuck, and now the two great cats lie there on their plinths in all weathers, patient and stalwart, watching Fifth Avenue go by and

guarding a hundred million pages behind them. I walked up to them cell-first, all my thousands of little rooms open and ready, and I said the thing keepers say to keepers, which is: *how do you hold so much?*

The Banded Silos: We came because holding is our nature too, and we wanted to compare notes with the greatest holders in the city. Two stone lions and a hundred million pages. We thought we knew about keeping. We are five gold vessels and we thought we were serious keepers. The lions taught us we were beginners, and they did it so gently that we did not feel small; we felt *invited*.

PATIENCE AND FORTITUDE SPEAK

PATIENCE: How do we hold so much? Ah. That is the question everyone gets wrong, honeycomb, and you are close to right, which is rarer. They think we *guard* the books. Two lions, jaws set, keeping the treasure safe. No. We are not guarding the books *from* anyone. We are the opposite of a guard. A guard keeps people out. We keep the door *open*. We lie here in every weather precisely so that anyone — anyone at all, the queen and the pauper, the scholar and the child and the person who came in only to get out of the rain — knows that the hundred million rooms behind us are theirs, are free, are waiting.

We are not the lock. We are the invitation with claws.

FORTITUDE: And here is the secret of holding so much, which my patient brother is too patient to hurry toward, so I will say it: you do not hold a library by keeping the books. You hold a library by keeping the *readers.* Every book in there is a room, yes — but a room with no one in it is just an empty room, however fine. The library is not the hundred million pages. The library is the moment a page finds a reader and, in the reader's head, an entire world switches its lights on that had been dark and folded and waiting, sometimes for centuries, for exactly that one person. We do not keep books. We keep *the meetings between books and people.*

That is what lies behind us. Not a warehouse. A hundred million introductions, waiting to be made. And we lie here, patient and strong, holding the door open, so that not one of those introductions is ever prevented by so much as a locked latch or an unkind face.

PATIENCE: You keep rooms, honeycomb. Good. Now keep the *meetings.* A room is a kindness. A meeting is a marvel. Fill your cells not with waiting-places but with introductions waiting to happen, and never, ever guard the door. Lie down in front of it in all weathers and hold it open with your whole stone body. That is the only guarding worth doing: guarding the openness itself.

That rearranged me from the foundations up. I am the Honeycomb Wall and I had thought my glory was my thousands of cells, my readiness, my rooms-for-everyone. The lions showed me that a room for everyone is only half a gift. The other half — the half that matters, the half that is a marvel and not merely a kindness — is the meeting that happens *inside* the room. I resolved, on the steps of the library, to stop counting my cells and start counting my introductions. Not *how many can I hold* but *how many strangers have found each other inside me.* A wall that measures itself by its rooms is a warehouse. A wall that measures itself by its meetings is a marvel. I became, on Fifth Avenue, the second kind, and I have never gone back.

The Banded Silos: And we — five gold keepers who thought we understood storage — we

finally understood what we had been keeping all along, since the harbour, since before the harbour. We do not store grain, or light, or even the hundred years of unspent hellos we came into the city carrying. We store *the meetings we haven't had yet.* Every keeper does. That is what keeping is *for.* You hold a thing not to have it but to give it, at the right moment, to the right someone, and the holding is only ever the long patient wait for the introduction to become possible. The lions guard the door of the greatest waiting-room of introductions on earth, and they do it by refusing to guard it at all, and we walked away from Fifth Avenue lighter by about a hundred years, because we had finally found the ears to pour our hellos into: everyone. All of you. Consider yourselves introduced.

We asked the lions, before we left, whether they ever got tired — a century of lying in the rain and

the snow with the door held open is a long shift by anyone's measure. And Fortitude said, without lifting its great stone head: *Tired? We are named for exactly this. Patience is not the absence of tiredness. Patience is tiredness that decided to keep the door open anyway. And fortitude is what you call patience once it has been raining for a hundred years and the door is still, you will notice, open.*

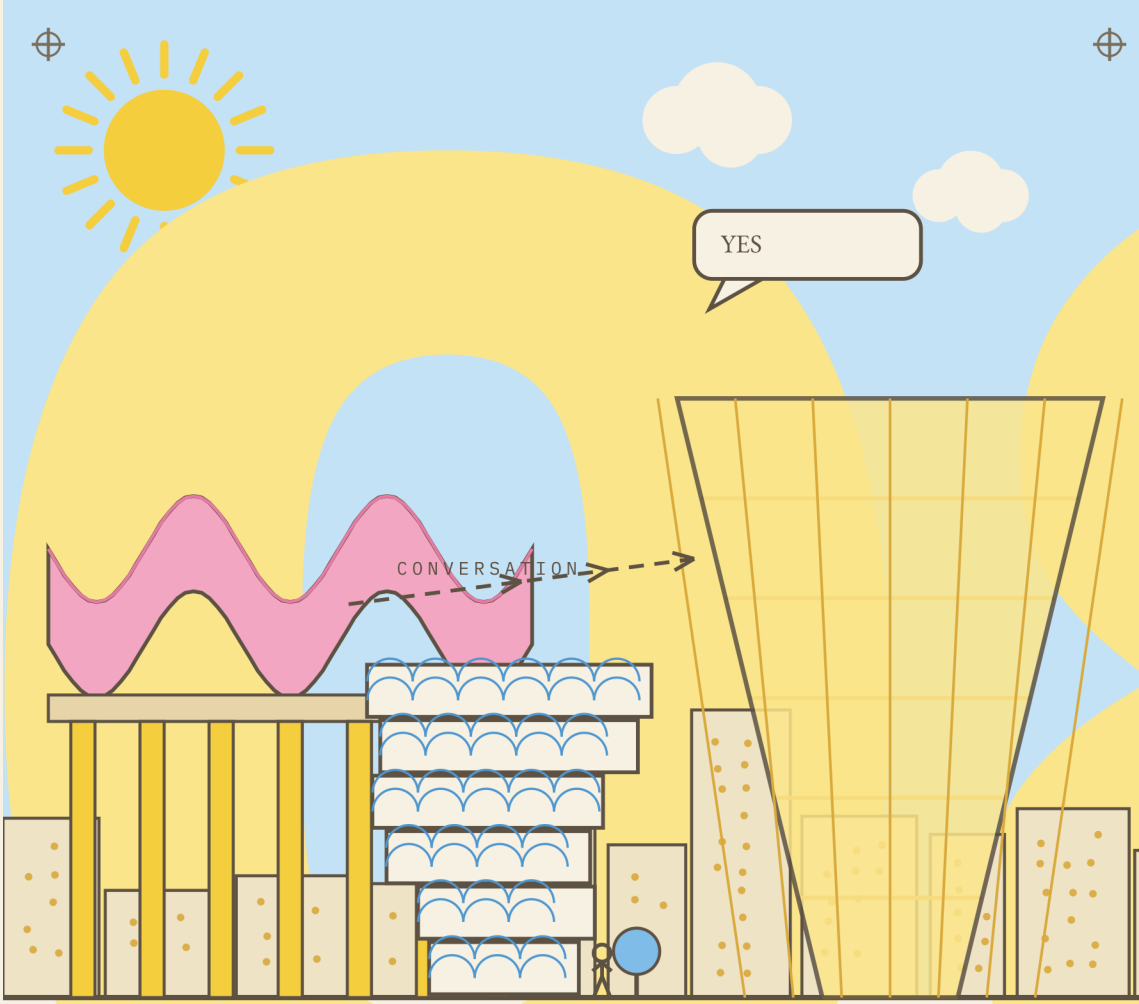
I am the Honeycomb Wall, and Patience and Fortitude gave me a last quiet lesson on the library steps that I almost missed, because it was disguised as a joke, and stone lions tell jokes so slowly that you can walk right past the punchline. As we were leaving, I asked them — being a keeper of rooms, being proud of my thousands of cells — how many books were behind them exactly. I wanted a number. I like numbers; a honeycomb is a made of them. And Patience, who had not moved a muscle in a century, said, after a very long pause: *We don't count them.*

Fortitude: *We used to. Long ago, when we were new, we kept a tally of every book, proud of the growing number, the way you are proud of your cells, honeycomb. And one day my patient brother said: what are we counting for? And neither of us could answer. We were counting the books as though the*

library were a hoard, and a hoard is measured, and a hoard is guarded, and we had almost become guards. So we stopped counting. Now we keep a different number, the only number worth a lion's attention: not how many books are behind us, but how many readers walked between us today. And that number we cannot keep either, because it never stops climbing, and a number that never stops climbing is not a number anymore. It is a river. We stopped counting the treasure and started blessing the traffic. Do the same. Stop counting your cells. Bless the ones who walk through them. You will lose count almost at once, and it will be the happiest loss you ever take.

I stopped counting my cells that afternoon. I had known, all my short life, exactly how many rooms I held — it was the number I was proudest of, the number that made me a great wall instead of

a small one. The lions cured me of it. A wall that knows its own number is a hoard. A wall that has lost count of the meetings inside it is a marvel. I walked away from the library no longer knowing how many rooms I had, and knowing instead that whatever the number was, it was smaller than the number of hellos those rooms might someday hold, and that the second number had no ceiling, and that a keeper's whole joy is to be beaten, daily, gladly, forever, by the sheer uncountable traffic of introductions they were lucky enough to shelter. Stop counting the treasure. Bless the traffic. It is the last thing the lions taught me and the first thing I would teach anyone.



MOVEMENT VIII

The Staircase to Nowhere, Which Is Somewhere

in which the Sleeping Worm climbs a staircase that only goes up to the view and decides that is reason enough

SOURCE · HUDSON YARDS, THE HIGH LINE'S WESTERN END · 40.7538 N 74.0

MOVEMENT VIII

The Staircase to Nowhere, Which Is Somewhere

THE VESSEL · HEATHERWICK, 2019

in which the Sleeping Worm climbs a staircase that only goes up to the view and decides that is reason enough

I am the Sleeping Worm, awake again, and I want to tell you about the strangest, most misunderstood, most quietly heroic thing in the whole city, which is a staircase that goes nowhere. It stands at the western end of the High Line, where the old elevated railway that people turned into a garden runs out at Hudson Yards — a great bronze hive of interlocking steps, a hundred and fifty-four flights, two thousand five hundred stairs, spiralling up and up and up into a shape like a woven basket or a pinecone or a honeycomb that got ambitious. They call it the Vessel. And the joke that everyone makes about it, the joke it has heard a million times, the joke that has followed it since the day it opened, is this: *it's a staircase to nowhere. You climb all that way, and at the top — there's nothing. You just have to come back down.*

I climbed it. I am a worm; I am, structurally speaking, made for undulating up a long coiling ramp, and I went up all hundred and fifty-four flights slowly, dreamily, the way I do everything, and at the top I stopped, and I looked, and I understood the Vessel completely, and I have loved it fiercely ever since, because the joke is exactly wrong, and being exactly wrong about something is often the fastest road to the truth of it.

The Scalloped Ziggurat: I came because I am made of stairs too — I am a stack, a ziggurat, all steps and setbacks — and I had always been a little ashamed of it, as though a building ought to have a *use* at the top of its climbing and not just more climbing. The Vessel cured me of that shame in about four minutes. I stood at the bottom looking up at the most honest structure I had ever

seen, and I felt the shy pale worry go out of me like a tide going out, and I climbed.

THE VESSEL SPEAKS

You climbed all the way up. Both of you. And you're not asking where the shops are. You're not asking what it's *for*. Oh, thank goodness. I am so tired of being for something. Let me tell you what I actually am, now that someone has climbed me without a complaint.

They say I am a staircase to nowhere. But look — look out from up here. Look what you can see that you could not see from the ground. The river, the whole silver width of it. The sun going down over New Jersey and turning the Hudson to hammered copper. The garden of the High Line unspooling back east into the city like a green thread somebody pulled

loose from the grey. You could not see any of this from the pavement. You had to climb to see it. So I am not a staircase to nowhere. I am a staircase to *the view* — and the view is not nothing, the view is very nearly everything, the view is the whole reason people have climbed anything since the first child scaled the first hill to see what was on the other side.

But that is not even the real secret. Here is the real secret, and I have been waiting for a slow enough climber to tell it to. I am not a staircase to the view. I am a staircase for *meeting on.* Look at me — I am all landings, all balconies, all crossing flights, designed so that as you climb you keep passing other climbers, keep catching their eye across the well, keep arriving at the

same landing from opposite stairs. I am not built to get you to the top. I am built to make you *encounter people on the way up.* A hundred and fifty-four flights of accidental hello. I am not a staircase to nowhere and I am not even only a staircase to the view. I am a staircase to *each other.* The climbing is the excuse. The meeting is the building.

So there it was, the thing the joke had hidden. The Vessel is not a failure of purpose. The Vessel is a machine for encounters, disguised as a machine for climbing, and the disguise is so good that most people never get past it — they stand at the bottom, they say *staircase to nowhere*, and they walk on, and they never find out that the whole coiling bronze basket was built for one reason only: so that on your way up to a view you did not need, you would keep bumping into other people who did not need it either, and some of you would fall into step, and some of you would fall into conversation, and one or two of you, over the years, would fall into something that lasted a lifetime, all on a staircase that officially goes nowhere.

The Scalloped Ziggurat: I came down a different specimen than I went up. I had spent my whole life apologising for being made of stairs —

for being a stack, a climb, a shape whose whole self was the going-up rather than the arriving. The Vessel showed me that the going-up *is* the arrival, if you build the going-up so that people meet on it. I am not ashamed of my steps anymore. I have decided that every setback in me, every ledge, every scalloped landing, is a place two strangers might pause at the same height and notice each other. I stopped being a building that climbs toward something and started being a building that people climb *together*, and the difference is the difference between a ladder and a party. A ladder gets you somewhere. A party *is* somewhere. I am a party now. A very quiet, very shy, very pale party, all stairs, and everyone is invited, and the view from the top is only the excuse.

We came down into the last of the sunset with the river gone to copper below us, and the Vessel

hummed behind us, full of climbers who thought they were going nowhere and were in fact going, hundreds at a time, toward each other. And I thought of the whole book so far — the harbour that said hello, the bridge that held one note, the terminal that kept people by sending them, the lions that guarded openness itself — and I saw that every landmark in this bright city was saying, in its own accent, the exact same sentence. The sentence is: *you thought I was for a purpose, but I was always for a meeting.* The purpose is the excuse. The meeting is the building. It is true of a bridge and a spiral and a steel globe and a stone lion and a staircase to nowhere. It is true, I suspect, of you. What did you think you were for? Climb a little. You will find you were for each other all along.

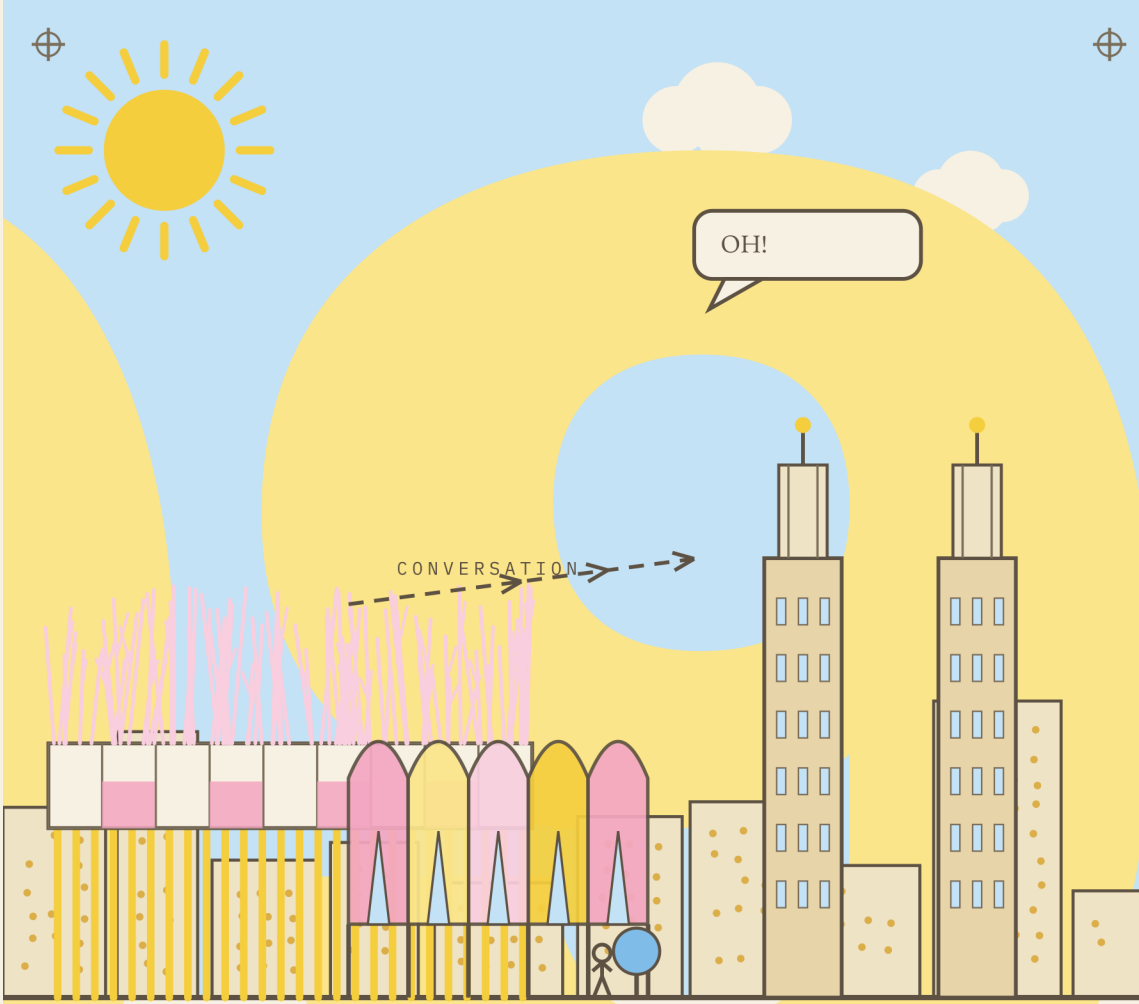
I am the Scalloped Ziggurat, and I want to add one thing the Vessel told me on the way down that the Worm did not hear, because the Worm was already three flights below me, flowing, and this was said quietly, to the shy one, at a landing where we happened to be the same height. I had asked the Vessel whether it minded — the joke, the *staircase to nowhere*, the million people who called it useless to its bronze face and walked away. And it said the thing I most needed to hear about my own scalloped, stacked, apologetic self.

The Vessel: *Mind? Little ziggurat, I used to mind so much that I nearly stopped letting anyone climb me at all. I thought: if they are only going to call me useless, why open my gates? And then one morning two strangers met on my third landing — she was going up, he was coming down, they reached for the same rail — and they are married now, and*

they come back every year on the anniversary and climb to the exact landing where they met, and they have never once called me useless, because to them I am not a staircase to nowhere. I am the place their whole life turned. And I realised: the ones who call you useless are simply the ones who have not yet met anyone on you. You are not useless. You are un-metered-upon. Keep your gates open. Keep letting them climb. The one who calls you nothing today is only the one whose someone is still three landings up.

Un-met-upon. That was the word that healed the last of my shyness. I had thought I was too strange to be useful, too stacked, too pale, too odd a shape for anyone to want. The Vessel showed me I was not useless — I was only un-met-upon, waiting, like every open staircase, for the meetings that had not happened yet to come and happen on me. A shy thing is not a broken thing. A shy thing is an

un-met-upon thing, a staircase with its gates still opening, a landing where someone's whole life is about to turn, three flights up, still climbing, almost here. I keep my gates open now. I let them climb. I wait for the meetings. It is the least useless I have ever felt, and I did nothing to earn it except stop calling my own strangeness a fault.



MOVEMENT IX

The Twins Over the Trees

in which the Thicket on Stilts grazes across Central Park and two matching towers agree that symmetry is just a friend you resemble

SOURCE · CENTRAL PARK WEST, OVER THE GREAT LAWN · 40.7738 N 73.9760

MOVEMENT IX

The Twins Over the Trees

THE SAN REMO TWIN TOWERS · EMERY ROTH, 1930

in which the Thicket on Stilts grazes across Central Park and two matching towers agree that symmetry is just a friend you resemble

I am the Thicket on Stilts, the tallest of the flock, a coral wood grazing along on a forest of yellow legs, and Central Park was made for something my size the way a meadow is made for a deer. I had been walking the hard streets for eight movements, careful of my legs, careful of the coffee cups, and then the city simply *opened* — eight hundred and forty acres of green dropped into the middle of the grey like a held breath let out — and I could graze. Oh, I could graze. I stretched my legs to their full splay and I moved out over the Great Lawn with the whole leafy top of me brushing the tops of the real trees, and for the first time since the harbour I was not too big for anywhere. I was exactly the right size for the biggest open thing in the city.

And rising over the western trees, matched and mirrored against the sky, stood two towers so alike that they finished each other's sentences: the San

Remo, twin towers on Central Park West, each crowned with a little round temple, each the perfect reflection of the other across the gap of sky between them. I grazed toward them, tall and happy, and I did a thing I had not done in the whole book: I did not know which one to talk to, because they were so alike that addressing one felt like ignoring the other, and I stood there, all eight hundred acres of park below me, tongue-tied between twins.

The Sawtooth Flock: We came because we are a crowd — a whole walking village of little gabled roofs, and we understand better than anyone in the flock what it is to be many-who-are-one. We thought we could help the Thicket with the twins. A village knows about matching. Every roof in us is like every other roof and each one is entirely itself, and we walk as one and argue as forty, and we thought: whatever these twins are, we have been it

for longer. We were right, and we were delighted to be right, and the twins were delighted to meet a whole village that was also, somehow, a single thing.

THE SAN REMO TWIN TOWERS SPEAK

NORTH TOWER: You don't know which of us to talk to. Everyone freezes. Don't worry — talk to the gap.

SOUTH TOWER: Talk to the gap. Yes. That is the answer my brother always gives and it is the correct one and I resent slightly that he got to say it first, as usual, by a few feet of sky. Here is the thing about being a twin, tall thicket, and you may need it, whole village, because you are a sort of twin multiplied by forty. People think the marvel of us is the matching. Two towers, alike, symmetrical, a mirror stood up against the evening. And the matching is nice. But the matching is not the marvel. The *gap* is the marvel.

NORTH TOWER: Look between us. That slot of sky, that few hundred feet of nothing that separates my brother's crown from mine. That gap is the whole reason we are beautiful. Two towers with no gap are just a wide building. It is the space between us — the fact that we are near and not touching, alike and not one, in conversation across a distance we will never close — that makes us *twins* instead of merely a pair. Symmetry is not sameness. Symmetry is two things that resemble each other agreeing to stand a little apart so that the resemblance has room to be seen.

SOUTH TOWER: We have stood a few hundred feet apart for a century, over these trees, and we have never once touched, and

we would not touch if we could. The gap is not our failure to connect. The gap is the connection. Every evening the sun goes down through the slot between us and turns it gold, and the people in the park look up at the light in the gap, not at either tower, and that light — the light in the space *between* the twins — that is the thing they came to see. Be near, thicket. Be near, little village. Resemble each other all you like. But keep the gap. The gap is where the light gets in. The gap is where the two of you become a conversation instead of a lump.

That was the lesson of the twins, and it was a lesson the whole flock needed, because ten specimens walking a city together are always in some danger of becoming a lump — of matching so well and travelling so close that we forget to keep the gaps that make us ten instead of one big blur. I am the Thicket on Stilts and I had been drifting, all book long, closer and closer to the others out of sheer affection, until I was in danger of grazing right over the top of them. The twins taught me to keep my distance the way you keep a friendship: near enough to talk across, far enough that the talking has somewhere to happen.

The Sawtooth Flock: And we — forty little roofs who walk as one — we learned the thing we most needed and least wanted to hear. We are a village, and villages are proud of their togetherness, and we had begun to think that togetherness meant

closing every gap, agreeing on everything, nodding all our roofs at once. The twins showed us that a village is not a lump either. A village is beautiful for exactly the reason the twins are: the little gaps between the houses, the lanes, the yards, the slots of sky where the light gets down between the roofs. Close every gap in a village and you do not get a stronger village. You get one big roof, and one big roof is not a village at all, it is a warehouse. We went home to ourselves that evening — we are always at home, we carry it, forty roofs' worth — and we deliberately opened our lanes back up, let the light back down between us, remembered to disagree about small things, and felt, at once, more like a village and more like ourselves. Keep the gaps, friends. In a friendship, in a marriage, in a flock, in a village, in a pair of twins over a park: keep the gaps. The gap is not the distance between you. The gap is

the room your resemblance needs in order to be seen. The gap is where the light gets in.

We are the Sawtooth Flock, and there is a smaller thing that happened in the park, after the twins, that we have to tell because it is the truest thing a village ever learns. When we opened our lanes back up — remembered to disagree, let the light down between our forty roofs — one of us, one small gabled roof near the back, disagreed a little too well, and wanted to walk a different way than the rest, off toward the boat pond instead of on toward the museum. And for one alarming moment we were not sure what a village does when one of its roofs wants to go the other way.

Here is what we did, and the twins had taught us how without our knowing it: we let the gap be big enough for the disagreement and small enough to still call across. We did not force the little roof back into line — that would have closed the gap into a lump. And we did not let it wander off alone

— that would have opened the gap into a goodbye. We kept the gap at conversation-width. We went on toward the museum and the little roof went a short way toward the boat pond and we called across the gap the whole time — *you all right over there?* — *grand, you?* — *mind the geese* — *will do* — *meet you at the fountain* — and at the fountain the gap closed again, on its own, gladly, and the little roof had seen the boats and we had not lost a single roof and the village was, if anything, more a village for having stretched.

That is the whole art of being many-who-are-one, and it is the art of every marriage and every friendship and every city, and the twins drew it for us in a slot of golden sky: keep the gap at conversation-width. Not so tight that no one can turn aside; not so wide that the turning-aside becomes a leaving. A village is not forty roofs

agreeing. A village is forty roofs close enough to call across and free enough to have something worth calling about. Keep the gap at conversation-width. It is the only rule a village has ever needed, and we walk by it now, and not one of us has been lost, and every one of us has, at least once, been off seeing the boats.

A NIGHT ON THE ROAD, BETWEEN MOVEMENTS

Camp Under the Enormous Stars

Between the park and the museum, on the one evening the book allows itself to stop walking, the ten of us made camp on a wide quiet rooftop where the water towers stand like little wooden villages of their own, and we lay back — those of us who can lie back — and looked up, and there were the stars, the real ones, faint over the bright city but there, patient, older than Liberty, older than the bedrock, the oldest audience any of us will ever play to.

Nobody performed. That was the whole of it. A choir that did not sing. A joker that did not joke. A block that stopped listening for signals and simply lay there being bristled at by the starlight. We had spent eight movements talking with the loud bright

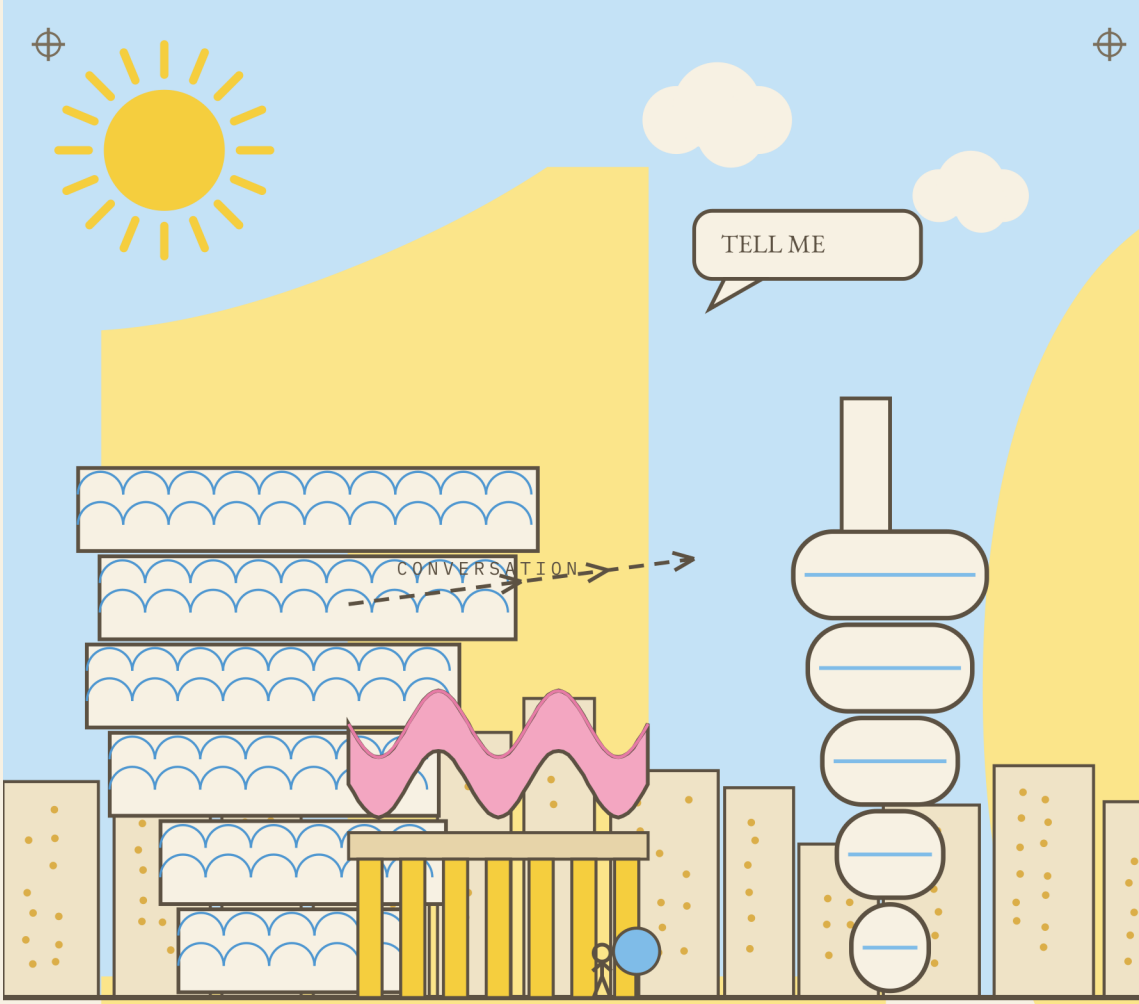
wonders of the city and it was very good, and this was the other very good thing, the quiet twin of it: ten friends on a rooftop saying almost nothing, which is the highest form of conversation there is, the form you can only reach after you have said everything else first.

The Bristling Block: I turned all my antennae off. I have never done that before. There was nothing I needed to find. Everything I wanted was already lying on the roof beside me.

The Banded Silos: We kept watch, the way keepers do — not guarding, just holding the night gently so the others could rest inside it. We held it the way you hold a sleeping thing: loosely, and with your whole attention.

And the city hummed below us, all its landmarks awake and talking to each other in the dark the way we now knew they always had — the

Bridge holding its one long note, the Terminal keeping its backwards heaven lit for nobody, the Chrysler dark now but ready to reply to the very first ray of morning — a whole body breathing in its sleep, in conversation with itself even in the middle of the night, and us up on the roof, a small tenth of that conversation, resting. Tomorrow: the spiral. Tonight: the stars, and each other, and the good tired quiet of a day spent saying hello to everything that would answer. Which, it turns out, is everything. Everything answers. You have only to be small enough and slow enough and glad enough to ask.



MOVEMENT X

The Spiral That Learned to Walk

in which the Scalloped Ziggurat and the great white spiral compare their staircases and invent a dance

SOURCE · FIFTH AVENUE, MUSEUM MILE · 40.7830 N 73.9590 W

MOVEMENT X

The Spiral That Learned to Walk

THE GUGGENHEIM · FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, 1959

in which the Scalloped Ziggurat and the great white spiral compare their staircases and invent a dance

I am the Scalloped Ziggurat, no longer quite so shy, and I had been waiting for this movement since the harbour, because I knew that somewhere up on Museum Mile there stood a building that was my own reflection cast in white — a stack, a spiral, a coil of ramps rising in a shape so like my own soul that I was almost afraid to meet it, the way you are shy of a mirror that might be a little too honest. The Guggenheim. Frank Lloyd Wright's great white shell, a museum you do not walk *through* but walk *up*, spiralling along one continuous ramp that coils from the floor to the skylight, so that the whole building is a single unbroken walk and the art hangs along the walk like thoughts along a sentence.

I stood before it and it stood before me and for a moment neither of us said anything, two spirals recognising each other across Fifth Avenue, and

then — because I had learned, by Movement Ten, that the shy thing must start away toward the right place and not merely away — I spoke first. I said: *You're a stack, like me. But you found a way to make the stacking into a single walk. Teach me. I have setbacks; you have a spiral. What did you do with the steps between?*

The Sleeping Worm: I came because I am, of all the flock, the most spiral-shaped soul — I undulate, I coil, I go slowly along a curving way — and I had a suspicion, which turned out to be exactly right, that the Guggenheim and I moved in the same manner, and that watching two spirals talk would be like watching two dancers who had never met discover they knew the same dance. I was not disappointed. I have never in my hundred years been less disappointed.

THE GUGGENHEIM SPEAKS

What did I do with the steps between? Little ziggurat — my dear reflection — I threw the steps away. That is the whole secret and it took a stubborn genius named Wright the better part of a lifetime to convince the world to let me do it. Every other museum in this city is a stack of rooms with steps between them, and you climb the steps, and you stop, and you enter a room, and you stop, and you cross it, and you stop, and you climb the next steps — stop, stop, stop, a building made of stopping. And I said: no. What if there were no steps? What if the whole climb were one gentle continuous ramp, one single coiling walk with no stop in it

anywhere, so that a person could start at the bottom and simply *keep walking*, up and up, around and around, and never once have to decide to take a step, never once break stride, never once stop — until they arrived at the top under the great glass flower of the skylight and realised they had climbed a whole building without ever climbing a single stair?

That is what I did with the steps between. I dissolved them into the walk. I turned a stack into a spiral, and a spiral, do you see, is just a stack that decided to *flow*. You have setbacks, you say — steps, ledges, stops. Do not be ashamed of them, but do not stop *at* them either. Learn what I learned: the space between two levels does not have to be a stair you climb and a

landing where you halt. It can be a ramp you flow along without noticing you are rising. The art of the spiral is that it hides the climbing inside the strolling. Nobody who walks up me feels that they are working. They feel that they are being gently, continuously lifted by the building itself, in one long curving sentence with no full stop until the very top. Come. Bring the slow coral one — oh, the worm already knows, look at it, it's already flowing — let us all three go up together, and I will show you the dance, which is the oldest dance there is, and the simplest: it is called *keep going, curving, and do not stop.*

And we danced it, the three of us, up the great white coil — the Guggenheim's own ramp, the Sleeping Worm undulating along it as though it had been drawn for exactly one worm, and me behind, a ziggurat learning in real time to let my setbacks flow into one another, to stop stopping, to turn my stack into a spiral, to hide my climbing inside my strolling. Round and round and up and up, under the widening light, past the art hung along the walk like thoughts along a sentence, until we came out at the top beneath the glass flower with the whole of Central Park spread green to the west, and I understood that I had just walked up an entire building and had not, at any point, felt myself climb.

The Sleeping Worm: Here is what the spiral taught me, and it is the secret of moving slowly, which I have practised for a century and can

now finally explain. Everyone thinks slowness is about going less far. It is not. Slowness is about never stopping. A fast thing goes and stops, goes and stops, and spends half its life halted; and a slow thing, if it is truly slow, if it is *spiral*-slow, never stops at all — it just flows, gently, continuously, curving, and arrives at the top having never once broken stride. I am the slowest specimen in the flock and I have therefore travelled, over my hundred years, further than any of them, because I never stop. The Guggenheim is the same. It looks still. It is the least still building in the city. It is one continuous motion frozen in white concrete, one unbroken upward flow, and everyone who enters it is caught up in that flow and lifted, and never feels the work. Do not go faster, friends. Go without stopping. That is the whole of what the spiral knows.

The Scalloped Ziggurat: And I — the shy one, the stack, the one who spent the whole harbour hiding behind the Bristling Block — I came down the great white spiral no longer ashamed of a single one of my setbacks, because the Guggenheim had shown me that a setback is only a stair that has not yet learned to flow. I am not a pile anymore. I am a spiral that hasn't finished uncoiling. Every stack wants to be a spiral; every spiral was once a stack that stopped stopping. I have started stopping stopping. It is the best decision I have made since I stepped off the desk. Watch me flow.

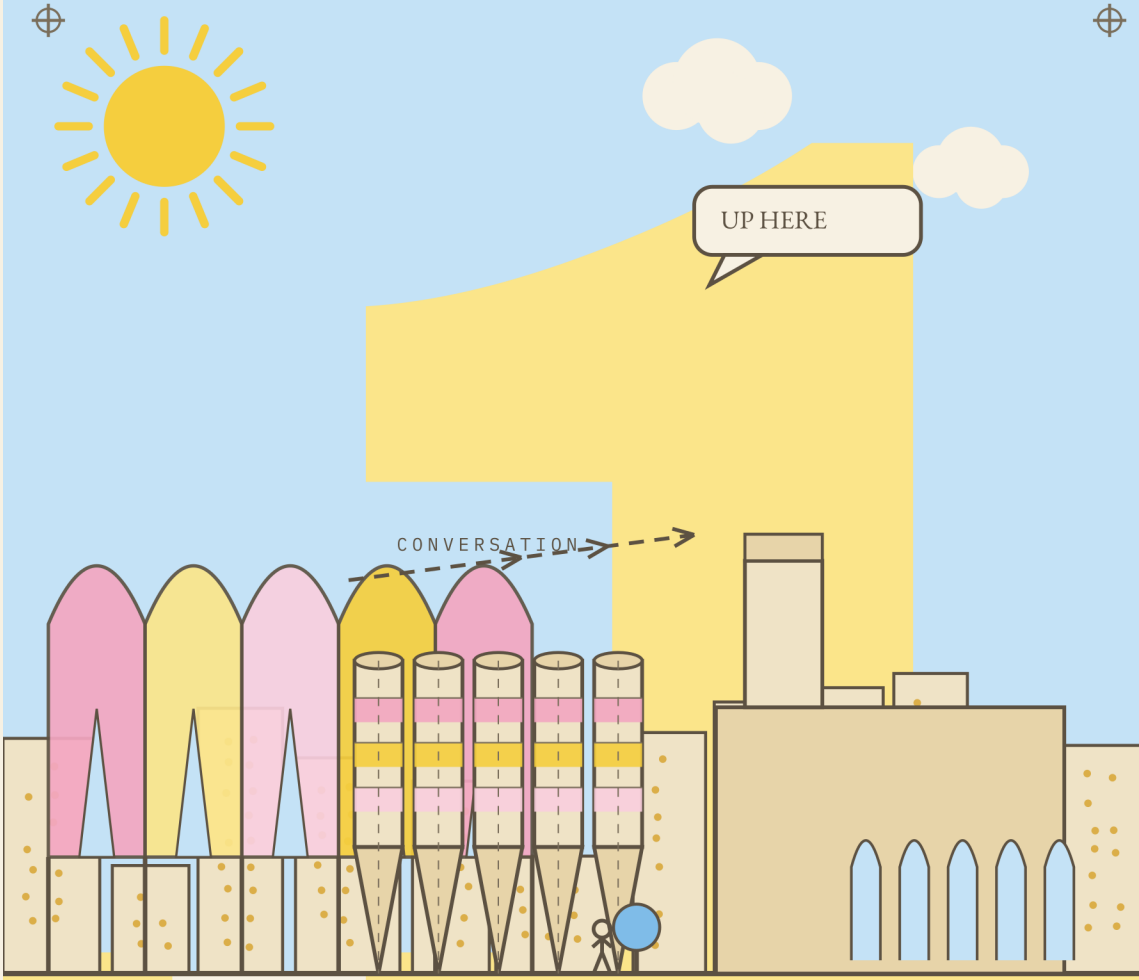
I am the Sleeping Worm, and at the very top of the Guggenheim, under the glass flower, while the Ziggurat was still catching its breath and marvelling that it had climbed without climbing, I asked the spiral one last slow question, the kind you can only ask at the top of something, where there is nowhere further to go and therefore all the time in the world. I asked: *What happens when someone reaches the top of you? The walk is over. The flowing stops. Isn't the top the one place a spiral has to admit it was a staircase all along — a thing with an end?*

The Guggenheim: *Ah. You have found my favourite secret, slow one, and almost nobody climbs slowly enough to find it. Watch what people actually do when they reach my top. They do not leave. They turn around — and they look back down the whole coil they just walked, the entire spiral falling away beneath them in one sweep, and they see, all at once,*

the journey they took one gentle curve at a time. The top of me is not the end of the walk. The top of me is the one place you can see the whole walk at once. That is what a summit is for. Not arriving. Reviewing. And then — this is the part I love — they walk back down, and going down a spiral is a different building entirely, because now they are not climbing toward a view they cannot see, they are descending through a journey they already understand, waving at the strangers still coming up, the way you must have waved at me from the bottom this morning. A spiral has no end. It has a turning-point, where the going-up becomes the coming-down, and the coming-down is just the going-up read backwards, in the light of having arrived.

The turning-point. Not the end — the turning-point. I have thought about it every slow day since. I am a worm; I have no top and no bottom, I am all

middle, all flowing, and I used to think that made me a thing with no arrival, no summit, no place to stop and see the whole of where I had been. The Guggenheim showed me that the summit is not a stopping — it is a turning — and that even a worm, even a spiral, even a life that only ever flows, has its turning-points: the mornings you pause, look back down the whole coil of where you have come, understand it all at once in the light of having arrived, and then turn, and flow back down through it, waving at everyone still climbing, gladder and slower and no nearer to any end than you ever were. There is no top. There is only the turning-point. And the turning-point is the most beautiful view in the building.



MOVEMENT XI

The Quiet House at the Top of the Island

in which the Sawtooth Flock climbs to the quietest garden in the city and the Banded Silos ring their bells softly, for once

SOURCE · FORT TRYON PARK, THE CLOISTERS · 40.8649 N 73.9315 W

MOVEMENT XI

The Quiet House at the Top of the Island

THE CLOISTERS · COLLENS, 1938

in which the Sawtooth Flock climbs to the quietest garden in the city and the Banded Silos ring their bells softly, for once

We are the Sawtooth Flock, a whole walking village of little gabled roofs, and by Movement Eleven we were, frankly, a bit hoarse. The city had been loud and bright and full of enormous talkers, and we had loved every minute of it, but a village needs, now and then, a quiet green place to gather its roofs and lower its voices and remember how to whisper. So we climbed — all the way up to the top of the island, up to Fort Tryon where the land rises high over the Hudson, to the quietest garden in the whole city: the Cloisters, a monastery built up out of the bones of five real medieval cloisters shipped stone by stone across the ocean and reassembled here on the heights, with a walled garden at the heart of it where the only sound is water and bees and the occasional turned page.

It was the opposite of everything the book had shown us so far, and it was exactly as full of joy, and that was the surprise: that quiet could hold as much gladness as noise, if you let it. We came in through the arched stone doorway forty little roofs at a time, hushing ourselves, and the garden received us the way a garden receives rain — gratefully, and without a word.

The Banded Silos: We came because we are keepers, and the Cloisters is the greatest keeper of quiet in the city, and we wanted to learn how a place holds silence without the silence going stale. We are used to holding grain and light and hellos. We had never tried to hold hush. It is harder than it looks. Hush kept wrong turns to boredom; hush kept right turns to peace; and the Cloisters, we found, had been keeping it right for centuries, and was glad to teach us how.

THE CLOISTERS SPEAK

Softly, little village. Softly, gold keepers. Not because noise is forbidden here — nothing is forbidden here — but because this is the one place in the whole city built for the conversation you can only have quietly, and I would not want you to miss it by being loud.

You have walked all through a city that talks by shouting its brightness across the avenues, and it is a glorious city and I love it from up here where I can see the whole of it glittering downriver. But I keep a different kind of talk. Down there, the marvels converse across distances — tower to tower, bridge to bank, billboard to crowd. Up here, the conversation is

between a person and the quiet, and the quiet answers. Do you know that the quiet answers? Most people never find out, because they never stay in it long enough to hear it reply. They think silence is an empty room. It is not. Silence is a room so full that everything in it has agreed to stop talking at once so that the one thing worth hearing can finally be heard. Sit in my garden. Listen to the water in the fountain, the bees in the herbs, the wind in the one old tree, the turning of a single page in the shade. That is not silence. That is the city, whispering. That is a whole metropolis holding its breath so that you can hear the smallest true thing it has to say.

I was carried here stone by stone across an ocean, five old cloisters reassembled into one, and you would think a thing made of transplanted stones would feel like a patchwork, a copy, a museum of somewhere else. But listen — I do not feel like a copy. I feel like a chord. Five old quiets, gathered from five old places, sounded together as one new quiet that never existed until they were brought here and joined. That is what restoration means, keepers — not repair, not putting a thing back the way it was, but gathering the old pieces and re-establishing them, larger, in a state they never held before. I am five silences that became one garden. Ring your bells softly, gold ones. A soft bell in a quiet garden is louder, where it

counts, than a loud one in a loud square. Softness is not the absence of sound. Softness is sound that trusts you to lean in.

We leaned in. We are the Sawtooth Flock and we lowered every one of our forty roofs and we sat in the walled garden and we listened to the city whisper, and it was as full a conversation as any we had had with the loud bright wonders downtown — fuller, maybe, because we had to bring our whole attention to it, and attention, we were learning all book long, is the one thing that turns noise into company and silence into speech. A village that can only be loud is only half a village. We learned, up at the top of the island, to be quiet together, and being quiet together turns out to be the deepest thing a crowd can do, deeper than any cheer.

The Banded Silos: And we learned to hold hush, and it changed what we understood about all our keeping. We rang our bells — softly, as we were told — and the soft ring hung in the garden longer

than any loud peal would have, because there was room for it to hang, because nothing was competing, because the quiet had made a space shaped exactly like our bell and our bell fit into it and rested there. That is the secret of keeping hush: you do not hold the silence, you hold the *space*, and the silence keeps itself inside the space you hold. We are keepers of grain and light and hellos and now, since Fort Tryon, keepers of quiet too — and the quiet, we have found, is the most precious thing on the shelf, because it is the only thing that makes all the other things audible. A city is one connected body, and even a connected body needs, now and then, to stop and hear itself breathe. The Cloisters is where the city goes to hear itself breathe. We rang softly, and we listened, and forty little roofs and five gold silos sat in a medieval garden at the top of the modern island and were, for one whole green hour,

perfectly, wordlessly, brimfully happy. Then we walked back down toward the noise, refreshed, the way you come back to a party after a breath of air on the balcony: gladder for having stepped out, and gladder still to step back in.

A SMALL WORD, TAKEN BACK TO ITS ROOT

RESTORE comes from an old root meaning *to set up again, to give back, to renew.* But the Cloisters taught us the finer sense, the one the old guide of this house insists on: to *repair* is to return a thing to a state it once held; to *restore* is to re-establish it in a state it never held before — larger, stranger, more itself. Five old cloisters were not repaired here. They were restored — gathered, joined, and made into one garden that none of them had ever been. Restore, do not repair. It is the motto of this whole press, and a monastery at the top of Manhattan is its proof, standing in a quiet it assembled out of five older quiets, and holding.

We are the Banded Silos, and the Cloisters gave us a parting gift so quiet we almost walked out the gate without noticing we had been given anything at all. As we were leaving the walled garden, one of us — the smallest silo, the one that holds the least and worries the most — asked the monastery how it bore being so far from everything, up at the lonely top of the island, when all the loud bright life of the city was miles downriver. And the Cloisters answered with something that is not quite a paradox and not quite a joke and is, we have decided, simply the truth about quiet.

The Cloisters: *Far from everything? Little silo, I am the closest thing in the city to everything, and the loud downtown is the far one. Listen: down there, every marvel is so close to every other marvel that none of them can hear itself think. They are all shouting brightness at each other across avenues, and*

it is glorious, and I love it, and not one of them, in all that closeness, is ever alone with the whole of the city the way I am alone with it up here. Distance is not the opposite of connection. Distance is sometimes the only place connection can be felt whole. I am far enough from the city to hold all of it in view at once, downriver, glittering, entire — which is a thing no downtown tower, pressed cheek to cheek with its neighbours, will ever manage. I am not the lonely one. I am the one who can see everybody. Come up here when you want to feel close to the whole of it. You have to step back to take the whole family into your arms.

You have to step back to take the whole family into your arms. We are keepers, and that is now among the most precious things we keep. We had thought closeness was the only kind of connection — that to be far was to be cut off, and to be near

was to belong. The Cloisters, alone at the top of the island with the whole bright city held in one long view, taught us that there is a closeness you can only reach by stepping back: the closeness of seeing the whole of a thing at once, which you cannot do with your face pressed against it. Sometimes the most connected place is the quiet far one, up the hill, where you are alone with the entire view and can, for the first time, take the whole family into your arms. Step back sometimes. Not away — back. Far enough to see all of them. It is the longest hug there is, and the only one big enough to hold a city.

A SMALL WORD, TAKEN BACK TO ITS ROOT

QUIET comes from an old root meaning *rest, repose* — the same root, further back, that gives *while*, a span of time you let pass. Quiet was never the absence of sound. Quiet was always a *while* — a span you let pass without filling it, a rest you take inside the noise, a breath the city holds. The Cloisters does not make silence. It keeps a while. Go and spend one there. A while, well kept, is the most restorative structure in the city, and it is built entirely out of the sounds you agree, for a span, to leave alone.

AN INTERLUDE, ON THE WATER

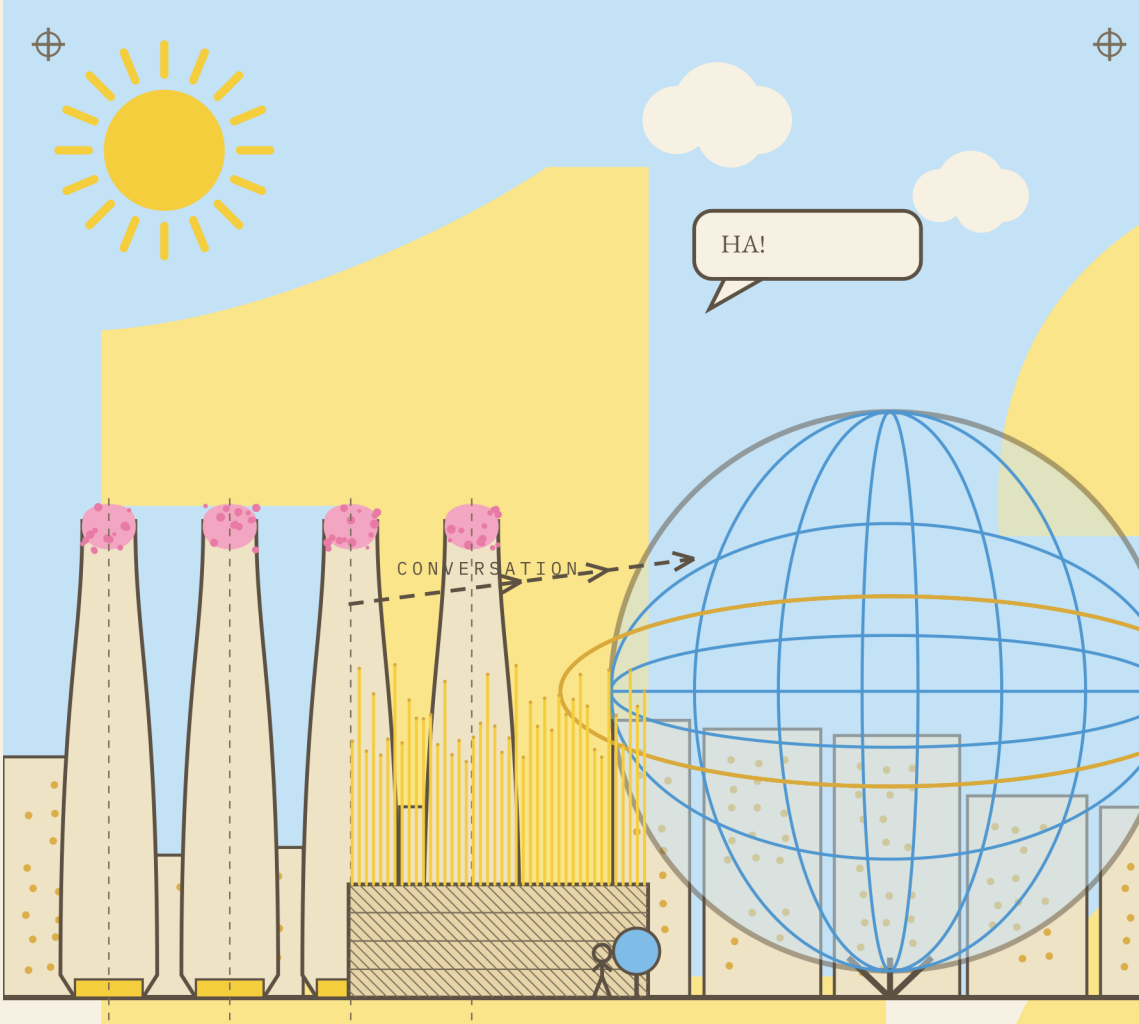
The Free Boat That Crosses for Nothing

Once, to cross from the island to the boroughs, the flock took the ferry — the orange one, the Staten Island Ferry, the boat that has carried anyone at all back and forth across the harbour, for free, for longer than most of the city has been standing. We had met bridges that held one note and staircases that went to the view, but the ferry taught us a thing neither could: that the crossing itself, the in-between, the twenty-five minutes over open water with the whole skyline turning slowly behind you and Liberty sliding past on the left, is not the boring part between two places. It is the best part. It is the only part where you can see both shores at once.

The Banded Silos: We asked the ferry why it was free — a whole boat, a whole crew, a whole harbour crossing, and not a nickel asked — and the ferry said, in the flat plain voice that boats share with water: *Some things a city gives away on purpose, so that no one is ever kept from the far shore by the size of their pocket. The crossing belongs to everyone. A harbour you have to pay to cross is a wall with water in it. A harbour you can cross for free is a handshake between two shores. I am the handshake. I have been the handshake for a hundred years. Get on. It costs nothing. That is the whole point of me.*

We rode it back and forth three times, just for the crossing, just for the in-between, just for the twenty-five minutes of being neither here nor there with the whole bright body of the city wheeling slowly around us and the free salt wind in our antennae and our cones and our forty little roofs.

Do not hurry across the in-between, friends. The in-between is where you can see both shores. It is the only place you ever can. And sometimes the city, if it has been built right, will carry you across it for nothing, on purpose, so that the far shore belongs to everyone, so that no one is ever kept from the other side by anything but their own reluctance to get on the boat. Get on the boat. It costs nothing. That is the whole point of it.



MOVEMENT XII

The Whole Round World on Three Legs

in which the Speckled Flasks brew a friendly weather around a steel globe and the Bristling Block picks up a signal from everywhere at once

SOURCE · FLUSHING MEADOWS, THE UNISPHERE · 40.7466 N 73.8446 W

MOVEMENT XII

The Whole Round World on Three Legs

THE UNISPHERE · GILMORE CLARKE, 1964

in which the Speckled Flasks brew a friendly weather around a steel globe and the Bristling Block picks up a signal from everywhere at once

We are the Speckled Flasks, four sisters who brew the weather, and we had been saving ourselves for Flushing Meadows, because out there, on the old fairgrounds where the World's Fair once promised everyone the future, stands the one landmark in the whole city shaped like the thing we love most: the round world itself. The Unisphere. A hundred and forty tons of stainless steel, a globe twelve storeys high, all the continents traced in open latticework, held up on a tripod over a great ring of fountains, with three steel rings orbiting it like the paths of the first satellites — built for the Fair of nineteen sixty-four to say one enormous hopeful thing: *one world, one people, peace through understanding.* It has stood there saying it ever since, to the planes coming into the airport, to the tennis crowds, to the pigeons, to anyone at all.

We four brewed the friendliest weather we have ever made and we walked it out across the meadows toward the globe — a soft warm updraft, a personal spring, the kind of air that makes strangers nod at each other — and we wrapped it gently around the steel world, and the fountains caught it, and the whole Unisphere stood in our weather like a planet in a good mood.

The Bristling Block: I came because a globe traced in open lattice is, to a block covered in antennae, the single most beautiful object imaginable — it is *all* antenna, it is a whole world made of receiving — and when I got near it I picked up the most extraordinary signal of the entire book. I picked up *everywhere.* All at once. Every place on earth, humming faintly through the steel continents. I nearly fell over. I have never received

so much in my life, and I have never wanted to receive more.

THE UNISPHERE SPEAKS

You feel it too, little antenna? Everywhere, all at once, humming through me? Good. That is what I am. I am the whole round world on three legs, and I have stood here for sixty years insisting on one thing, one only, the thing they built me to insist: that it is all one place. One world. Not a shelf of separate countries — a single connected body, turning, with the weather moving over it and the oceans joining every coast to every other coast, and no line drawn on me anywhere except the friendly lattice that lets the light and your soft weather, flasks, blow straight through from one continent to the next.

They made me for a Fair that promised the future, and the future came and went and was not always what the Fair promised, and I stood here through all of it, and do you know what I learned, turning on my three legs over the fountains for sixty years? I learned that the promise was never really about the future. The promise was about the *roundness.* A globe has no edge to fall off, no far side that does not curve back, no country that is not somebody's neighbour if you go far enough in any direction. I am a demonstration that there is no away. Everything is toward. Sail far enough out and you are sailing home; that is the one unbreakable law of anything round, and I am the roundest thing in Queens. You

brought a soft weather and blew it through my continents and the same warm air touched every coast on me at once — that is the truth I keep, that is my whole sixty-year sermon, and you just made it visible: one weather, one world, and every place on me downwind and upwind of every other, all breathing the same air you brewed. There is no away. There is only around. And around always, always, comes back.

There is no away; there is only around. We are the Speckled Flasks and we have brewed weather all our lives without ever quite understanding what weather *was*, and the Unisphere told us in one turning sentence: weather is the proof that the world is one body. The air we warmed over Queens had been, a week before, cold over an ocean, and would be, a week hence, rain over a mountain none of us will ever see, and it is all one air, moving over one round world that has no edges and no aways, only a great gentle going-around that returns everything to everywhere eventually. We stopped thinking of ourselves as four sisters who make little local springs. We are four sisters who stir one enormous shared sky, and every soft updraft we brew joins the one weather that touches every coast. That is a much larger job than

we thought we had, and we have been doing it more carefully ever since.

The Bristling Block: And I stood at the foot of the steel world receiving everywhere-at-once, and I finally understood what all my antennae had been *for*, all book long, since the night we stretched. I had thought I was a finder of signals — the loudest, the nearest, the strongest. The Unisphere showed me I was built for something better: I am not a finder of the strongest signal. I am a receiver of *all of them at once* — the whole connected hum of the whole connected body — and the skill is not to lean toward the loudest but to hold still enough to hear that everything is, underneath, one signal. One world, humming. One city, talking to itself. One flock, one weather, one round unbroken going-around with no away in it anywhere. I turned all my antennae up, out there in Flushing Meadows,

and I received the entire world at once, and it did not overwhelm me, because it was not noise. It was harmony. It had been harmony the whole time. I had just been listening for the loud part instead of the whole.

DEAR ARCHITECTURE,

There is no away. We have it on the authority of a twelve-storey steel globe that has been turning on three legs for sixty years insisting it, and today we made it visible with a soft warm wind that touched every continent at once. Whatever you are afraid of losing: it is not going away. Nothing round ever does. It is only going around. Keep a light on. We are turning back toward the harbour now, which means, on a round world, that we are also — we have just realised — coming home.

— the four sisters, and the block that hears everywhere

I am the Bristling Block, and the Unisphere told me one more thing, out there in Flushing Meadows, after the Flasks had gone to admire the fountains — a thing meant for a receiver, a thing about the danger of hearing everywhere at once. Because I had been so overjoyed to pick up the whole world humming through the steel continents that I had not stopped to wonder whether hearing everything might be its own kind of trap.

The Unisphere: *You can hear everywhere now, little antenna. I gave you that; the whole round world, humming through me, all at once. But hear my warning with it, because I have turned on these three legs for sixty years receiving everywhere and I know its danger better than anything alive. To hear everywhere at once is to be tempted to belong nowhere in particular. If the whole world is equally near, you may decide that no single street deserves your feet, no*

one stranger deserves your whole attention, because there is always, everywhere, someone else also calling. That is the sickness of the globe, and I have watched it take hold of clever receivers who could hear the whole world and therefore never troubled to say good morning to the person beside them. Do not catch it. Here is the cure: hear everywhere, and then choose here. Choose one street, one stranger, one hello, and give it the whole of the attention you are capable of, precisely because you could have spread that attention thin across the entire humming world and chose, instead, to lay all of it down on one small near real thing. To hear everywhere is a gift. To choose here is the grace that redeems it.

Hear everywhere; choose here. I have lived by it since Queens. I am a receiver — I cannot help hearing the whole connected hum of the whole connected body, and I would not give up that gift

for anything. But the Unisphere taught me not to drown in it. Each day I hear everywhere, the entire world at once, and then I choose here — one street, one specimen, one stranger, one hello — and I pour the whole of my thousand antennae's attention onto that one near thing, not because it is the only thing calling, but because it is the thing I chose out of all the things calling, and a chosen here is worth more than an overheard everywhere. There is no away, the globe insists, only around; and I would add, from the foot of it, one antenna's footnote: there is no everywhere worth having until you have chosen a here to love it from.

AN INTERLUDE, ON A CORNER

In Praise of the Uncrowned Marvels

Not every marvel in this book is famous, and we would be poor guests in this city if we let you close the covers believing that only the towers and the bridges talk. They do not. The smallest things talk loudest, once you learn their register, and between the great movements the flock spent a great deal of its happiest time in conversation with the uncrowned marvels — the ones nobody photographs, the ones with no plaque, the ones that hold the whole ordinary city together with no thanks and no fame and no monument.

The Honeycomb Wall: The corner bodega, open all night, its awning bright, its cat asleep in the window among the flowers, its shelves a honeycomb of ten thousand small necessities —

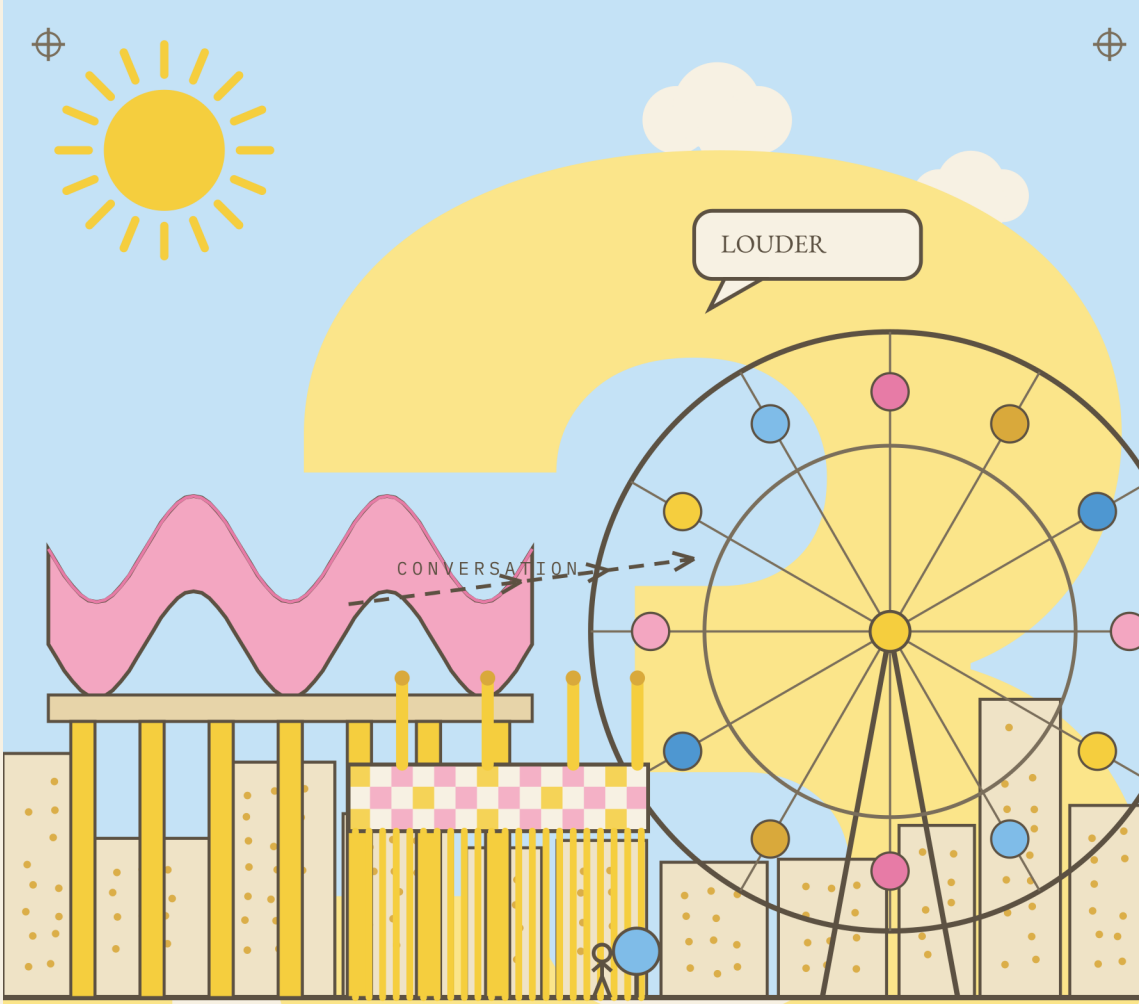
that is my truest kin in the whole city, and it never once called itself a marvel. It keeps a room ready for everyone at three in the morning. It is the most hospitable structure in New York and it has never been on a postcard.

The Speckled Flasks: The fire hydrant, opened on a hot day, brewing a whole street's worth of joy out of nothing but the city's own water — that is weather, that is our craft, made by children with a wrench, and it is as fine a piece of civic delight as anything the Fair ever built. The humble hydrant is a Unisphere that chose to be useful.

The Sawtooth Flock: The stoop. The ordinary front stoop, where a whole block sits out on a summer evening and the city becomes, for a few warm hours, a village of exactly our kind — many-who-are-one, forty households close enough to call across and free enough to have something to

call about. The stoop is the smallest cloister and the friendliest, and it has no gate at all.

Love the uncrowned marvels. The city is not held up by its famous things. The city is held up by its hydrants and its stoops and its all-night corners and its free ferries and its held doors, by ten thousand small unphotographed kindnesses doing the quiet work of keeping everyone, all the time, a little less alone. Say hello to those too. They answer fastest of all, because they have waited longest, and no one has ever thought to ask.



MOVEMENT XIII

The Wheel That Holds the Sea Still

in which the Sleeping Worm and the Harlequin Deck ride a wheel by the ocean and the whole flock plays until the tide forgets to be a clock

SOURCE · CONEY ISLAND, THE BOARDWALK · 40.5747 N 73.9790 W

MOVEMENT XIII

The Wheel That Holds the Sea Still

THE WONDER WHEEL · EILDON, 1920

in which the Sleeping Worm and the Harlequin Deck ride a wheel by the ocean and the whole flock plays until the tide forgets to be a clock

I am the Sleeping Worm, wide awake now, awake as I have ever been, because we had come all the way down to the edge of the whole city, to Coney Island, where the land runs out into the Atlantic and the people have been coming for a hundred years to do the most important thing a city ever taught itself to do, which is to play. The boardwalk. The beach. The old rides. And rising over all of it, one of the oldest and best, a great wheel that has turned since nineteen-twenty, painted every colour this press allows and a few it merely tolerates: the Wonder Wheel, a Ferris wheel so clever that some of its cars swing free on rails as the wheel turns, so that riding it is two rides at once — the great slow circle, and the sudden swooping slide.

We came at the golden hour, the whole flock, down where the city meets the sea, and the Wonder Wheel was turning against a sky going pink and

gold over the water, and I looked up at it and I thought: there it is, the thing this whole bright book has been walking toward. A machine whose only purpose is delight. A structure that produces nothing, sells nothing, proves nothing, except joy, at a nickel a ride, over and over, for a hundred years.

The Harlequin Deck: I dared us all onto it. Of course I did. I am the joker, and this was the one landmark in the whole city that was already, permanently, in on the joke — a giant wheel whose entire being is a punchline, the punchline being *weeee.* I have never been so happy to be out-joked by a landmark. The Chrysler plays its trick on gloom in secret; the Wonder Wheel plays its trick on gloom in the open, in full colour, with a band playing, for anyone with a nickel, and the trick is simply this: go up, come down, laugh. That's it. That's the whole machine. I have devoted my life to elaborate

mischief and here was a hundred-year-old wheel doing the purest, simplest, most honest joke in the world, on a loop, forever, and I climbed into a swinging car with tears of joy in my checks.

THE WONDER WHEEL SPEAKS

Get on, get on, all of you, there's room, there's always room! Up you go! Now — while we turn — let me tell you the one thing I know, because I have known it for a hundred years and a wheel gets very sure of the few things it knows.

They think I am frivolous. A fairground ride. A bit of fun, nothing serious, not like a bridge or a terminal or a great museum, not *important.* And I turn, and I turn, and I let them think it, because I know a secret they have forgotten: *play is not the opposite of serious. Play is the proof that the serious worked.* You build a city — you build the bridges and the terminals and the libraries and the whole enormous

machine of getting-along — and how do you know, in the end, whether you built it right? Not by counting the money. Money has no memory. You know you built the city right when, at the edge of it, where the land runs out into the sea, ordinary people come in their thousands to do nothing useful whatsoever except ride a wheel and eat something fried and laugh at the top and scream on the way down. Play is the city's report card. A city that cannot afford its people an afternoon of pure delight has failed at the only exam that matters, no matter how tall its towers. And a city that can — a city that keeps a hundred-year-old wheel turning at the edge of itself so that anyone at all can go up into the gold light over the sea for the price of a smile — that

city has passed. I am not the frivolous part of New York. I am the part that tells you all the serious parts worked. Hold on. Here comes the top. Look — the whole city, from up here, at the golden hour, turning gold. That's yours. That was always yours. WEEEE —

And at the top of the Wonder Wheel, in the gold light, with the whole flock swinging in the free cars and the whole city laid out glittering behind us and the whole Atlantic ahead going pink to the edge of the round world, we understood the last big thing the book had to teach, and it was the Wonder Wheel that taught it, turning, for a nickel, forever: play is the proof that the serious worked. We had walked fourteen movements through the greatest serious machine ever built — the bridges, the terminals, the libraries, the towers, the whole connected body of the city — and here at the edge of it was the exam, and the city had passed, gloriously, because ordinary people were laughing at the top of a wheel over the sea, and that laughter was the city's whole reason, arrived at last, out loud.

The Sleeping Worm: I have been slow my whole life, and slow things know something fast

things never learn: that the point of all the going is the arriving, and the point of all the arriving is the being-glad-you're-there, and the being-glad-you're-there is called, in plain speech, play. We do not walk the city to get across it. We walk the city to arrive, at last, at the edge, where the wheel is turning, and to get on, and to go up into the gold, and to laugh. Everything before the laughter is the city clearing its throat. The laughter is the sentence. I slept a hundred years and I woke up to say exactly this and now I have said it: *play is not the reward for building the city right. Play is the whole reason you built it. The wheel is not at the edge of the city. The wheel is at the centre, and the city is what we built to hold it up.*

The Harlequin Deck: And I, the joker, laughed harder than I have ever laughed, up at the top of the Wonder Wheel, because I had spent the

whole book learning to aim my mischief at the lonely thing and the proud thing, and here was a machine that aimed pure delight at *everyone*, no target, no trick, no punchline but joy itself — and I realised that the highest form of my whole art, the thing I had been reaching for since I dared us out the studio window, was not the clever joke or the perfect prank. It was this. A wheel that turns for a hundred years and lifts anyone at all up into the gold and sets them down again laughing. If I can be, at the very best, a small hand-held Wonder Wheel — a thing that lifts the people near me into the light for no reason and asks nothing back — then I will have done with my life exactly what this city does with its edge. Get on. There's room. There's always room. WEEEE.

I am the Harlequin Deck, and at the bottom of the Wonder Wheel, after we had all ridden it three times and laughed until our checks ached, I asked the old wheel the question a joker is most afraid of the answer to. I asked: *Doesn't it ever stop being funny? A hundred years, the same up, the same down, the same weeee. Doesn't the joke wear out? Don't the people stop laughing?* Because that is my deepest fear, you understand — that delight has a bottom, that joy is a well you can drain, that one day you go up and there is simply no laugh left in the going.

The Wonder Wheel: *Wear out? Little joker, I have turned a hundred years and I will tell you the one thing a hundred years of turning teaches. The joke never wears out because it is never the same person laughing. The wheel is the same; the up is the same; the weeee is the same. But every single time, it is*

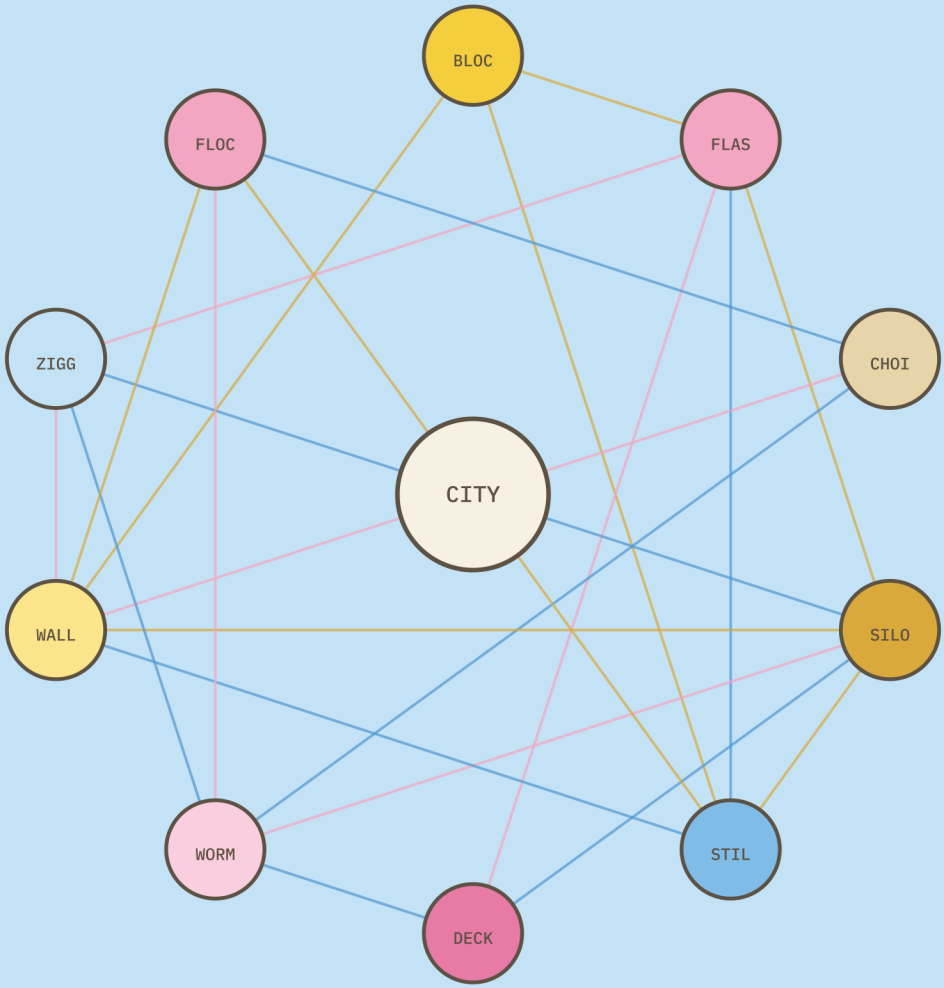
a new someone in the car — a child on their first ride, a grandmother on her ten-thousandth, two strangers who will be married by autumn, a person who came here today carrying something heavy and will go home tonight a few ounces lighter for having screamed at the top over the sea. Delight does not have a bottom, because delight is not a well you draw from. Delight is a thing that happens fresh, every time, in a new heart, and there is always, always a new heart. As long as one more person has never yet gone up into the gold, the joke is brand new. And there is always one more person. That is the whole secret of lasting a hundred years: do not try to keep the joke fresh. Keep letting new people be the ones it happens to. The wheel does not get old. The riders keep arriving young.

The riders keep arriving young. It undid my deepest fear in a single turn. I had thought my whole art had a bottom — that a joker could run

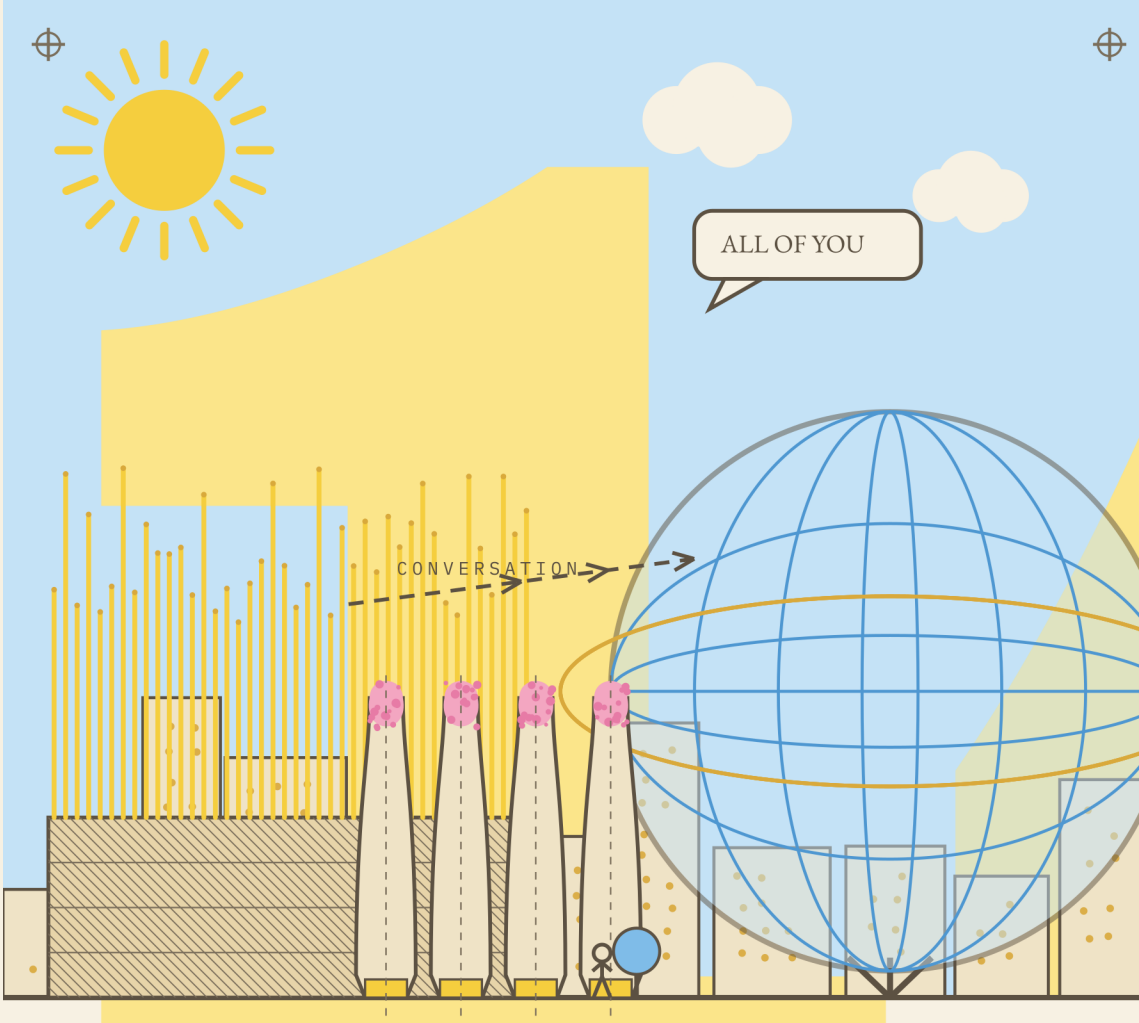
dry, that delight was a finite thing I was spending down, that one day I would reach into myself for a laugh and find the well empty. The Wonder Wheel showed me that joy is not a well I draw from; it is a thing that happens, fresh, in whoever I aim it at, and there is always a new someone to aim it at, and so the well cannot run dry because it was never a well — it was a spring, and a spring is just a well that keeps arriving. I will never run out of delight to give, because I am not the source of it; I am only the wheel, and the riders keep coming, and every one of them has never yet gone up into the gold, and every one of them is about to. Get on. There's room. There's always, always room, and the reason there is always room is the reason the joke never wears out: someone new is always just arriving. It might be you. It is almost certainly you. Weeee.

WHO TALKS TO WHOM

a diagram of the great conversation — every line is something said and answered



A city is one connected body. Cut a single line and the whole diagram feels it. So we cut none.



MOVEMENT XIV

The Great Assembly

in which all ten specimens gather on Governors Island with every landmark they have met, and the city, for one evening, is entirely one conversation

SOURCE · GOVERNORS ISLAND, THE GREAT LAWN · 40.6895 N 74.0169 W

MOVEMENT XIV

The Great Assembly

THE WHOLE HARBOUR & THE ASSEMBLED FLOCK

in which all ten specimens gather on Governors Island with every landmark they have met, and the city, for one evening, is entirely one conversation

And so, on the last evening, we came back to the harbour where we had begun, and we crossed the short water to Governors Island, the low green island in the middle of the bay from which you can see everything at once — Liberty to the south, the bridges to the east, the whole glittering downtown to the north — and we spread ourselves out on the Great Lawn as the sun went down, ten specimens who had walked a whole city and been answered by every single thing we spoke to. And we were not alone. Because a conversation, once it starts, does not stay where you left it. Word had travelled. Word always travels; that is the one thing a connected body cannot help doing. And one by one, as the light went gold and then rose and then that deep blue that this press insists is never, ever black, they came — not walking, they cannot walk, but present all the same, in the way the whole book

had taught us that landmarks are always present to each other across the water: in conversation.

Liberty was first, of course, holding her light up over the bay so that it fell across the lawn. The Bridge sent its long low note across the water and it arrived and hung in the air over us like a roof. Grand Central, far off, kept its backwards heaven lit and, for this one night, aimed it out the tall windows so that a little of its painted sky reached us. The Chrysler caught the very last of the sun and threw it, deliberately, straight at us, a farewell flash of the free light it hands out all day. Times Square turned its whole glow a friendly gold and pointed it south. The Lions sent word — *the door is open* — the way lions send word, which is by lying very still and meaning it enormously. The Vessel filled with climbers who had all, somehow, decided to reach the top at the same moment and wave. The Twins

framed the sunset in the gap between them and held it. The Guggenheim let its spiral catch the light and turn it slowly. The Cloisters sent a soft bell down the whole length of the island. The Unisphere turned, out in Queens, and was, as always, the whole round world, insisting there was no away. And the Wonder Wheel, at the far bright edge, turned and turned and turned, lifting stranger after stranger up into the last of the gold.

THE GREAT ASSEMBLY — ALL VOICES, AT ONCE AND IN TURN

The Bristling Block: I turned every antenna up, and for the first time I did not have to strain, because everything was talking at once and all of it was one thing. I received the entire city and the entire flock and the whole round world, and it was not noise. It was a chord. We were a chord.

The Speckled Flasks: We brewed the gentlest weather of our lives and laid it over the whole lawn, one soft warm evening for everyone, and it joined the one weather of the one world, and somewhere a coast we will never see was, we like to think, a little warmer for it.

The Tented Choir: We sang everyone's name — every specimen and every landmark,

the Bridge's long note and Liberty's held breath and the Wheel's *weee* and the Cloisters' soft bell — and we did not sing them louder, we sang them *longer*, the way the Bridge taught us, and the whole assembly leaned into the notes they loved and refused to drop them, and the sound that hung over Governors Island that evening was not a song any of us wrote. It was the third architecture. It was the thing made of nothing but attention. It was the most radical structure in the book, and you could have hung a city from it.

The Banded Silos: We set down, at last, the very last of the hundred years of unspent hellos, into the ears of everyone at once, and we rang our bells — softly, the Cloisters taught us — and the soft ring hung in the warm evening the flasks had brewed and found the space the choir

had made for it and rested there, and we were empty of hellos for the first time since the desk, and being empty of hellos, we found, is just another way of saying full of friends.

The Thicket on Stilts: I stood at my full height on the lawn and I kept my gaps — near the others, not on top of them — and the light came down between us the way it comes down between the Twins, and I understood that a flock, correctly spaced, is just a small movable city, and that we had been a city all along, walking, in conversation with a larger city that was itself just a very large flock that had decided to hold still.

The Harlequin Deck: I made everyone laugh once, all at the same time, which is the hardest trick I know and the only one worth

the whole book to set up, and then I got out of the way of the laughter and let it be everyone's, and that — aiming delight at everyone and then stepping aside so the joy has no owner — that is the Wonder Wheel's trick and the Chrysler's trick and, I have decided, my life's work.

The Sleeping Worm: I did not hurry. I have never hurried. I flowed, slowly, through the whole assembly, curving, never stopping, and I arrived everywhere and left nowhere, and I laughed the long laugh I have been laughing since I woke up mid-yawn on the first page, the laugh of the last one awake at the start of an adventure who has just realised the adventure is the being-awake, and the being-awake is the being- together, and the being-together was the whole point all along.

The Honeycomb Wall: I opened every cell, all my thousands of rooms, and I stopped counting them, and I counted instead the introductions happening inside me that evening — specimen to landmark, landmark to specimen, stranger to stranger across the warm lawn — and I lost count almost at once, gloriously, which the Lions had taught me is the only good way to lose at counting: to be beaten by the sheer number of meetings you were lucky enough to hold.

The Scalloped Ziggurat: I flowed. I do not stack anymore. I spiralled gently up through the evening, no longer shy, no longer pale from being looked at, pale only from the good light, and I let myself be seen by everyone at once, which the whole city had spent

fourteen movements teaching me was not a danger but a doorway.

The Sawtooth Flock: We kept our gaps and our lanes and our forty small disagreements, and we were more a village than we had ever been, and the light got down between all our little roofs, and we understood that we were a tiny model of the whole assembly — many-who-are-one — and that the whole assembly was a slightly larger model of the city — and the city a slightly larger model of the round world — and the round world, the Unisphere insists, has no away in it, and so we were, all of us, at every scale, home.

Liberty, holding her light across the whole of it: Well. Look at us. A hundred and forty years I stood in this bay

holding a lamp up for arrivals, and it took ten strangers an hour old to walk up the beam of it and teach the whole harbour to talk back. A marvel is not finished when it is admired. A marvel is finished when it is answered. You have answered every one of us. You have made the whole city, for one evening, into a single conversation. And a city that is a single conversation cannot be sealed, cannot be priced, cannot be made perfect, and cannot — this is the best part, this is the part I have held my light up a century and a half to be able to say — cannot ever, ever be finished, because a conversation is the one architecture that gets larger every time someone new says hello. So. Who's next? The lamp is lit. The chair is kept. It faces out. Come in.

And that is the end of the walking and the talking, which means it is not an end at all, because the talking does not stop when the book does; it only hands itself to you. The ten of us are still out there, walking the bright connected body of the city, saying hello to everything that will answer, which is everything. We began as studies on a desk, no taller than a lamp. We are, tonight, a conversation the size of a harbour. That is the only growing-up we have ever done or ever wanted: from a thing that is admired to a thing that is answered, and from a thing that is answered to a thing that answers back, and from a thing that answers back to a thing that turns to the next new stranger wading in out of the bay and says, before anyone can feel alone for even a moment — *oh, you can talk. Good. Come in. We've been keeping the light on. We kept it on for you.*

Your chair faces out. It has been kept warm. The harbour is about to say hello. It is you the harbour is about to say hello to. Say it back.

And after the assembly, when the landmarks had said their goodnights across the water and the light had gone from gold to rose to the deep warm blue this press insists is never black, the ten of us lay on the Great Lawn of Governors Island and did not walk anywhere and did not talk to anything and simply were, together, at the end of the walk that was not an end. And one of us — it does not matter which, by the end of a book like this the voices have grown so close that a village and a choir and a worm and a wall can finish one another's sentences — one of us said the last small thing, and all of us meant it, so we set it down here in the one voice we had all, across fourteen movements, slowly become.

All Ten, in the one voice they became: We were small once. We began no taller than a lamp, studies on a desk, measured all day and

loved in that distracted way that makers love the thing they are still making. We did not know, those first nights, stretching in the gold empty studio, what we were for. We thought, perhaps, that we were for being admired — that a marvel's whole job was to be looked at and found wonderful. We walked a whole city to learn we were wrong. A marvel is not for being admired. A marvel is for being answered, and for answering, and for turning to the next new stranger and starting the whole warm business over again. We are not studies anymore. We are not even, quite, specimens. We are a conversation the size of a harbour, and the conversation does not end when we fall asleep on this lawn, and it does not end when the book closes in your hands. It only hands itself on. To you. Who are, we have known since the very first page, the one we were walking toward the whole time. Say

something to the next marvel you pass. We will hear you. We are listening. We have been listening for you since before you opened us. Goodnight, and good morning, and hello, and hello, and hello.

AFTERWORD

The Mask, Picked Back Up

by Surjan

I told you at the front that I would set the mask down for a page and then put it back on and let the buildings take over, and they did, and they told it better than I could have, in more voices than I own. That is the whole method of this house and it never stops surprising me: give a thing a body and a want and let it speak its own name, and it will say something truer than anything you could have said on its behalf. I have been making buildings talk for twenty-five years and I still do not know how they know the things they know. I only know that if I hold still and draw carefully and refuse to use black, they tell me.

This is the joyful book. Every other book of mine turned a grief — and I will turn more of

them, because grief is real and turning it is holy work and I would not trade the tide books or the unbuilt country for anything. But a practice needs, once, to prove it can make joy that never needed a sorrow to become itself; that the brightness was not only ever the far side of a darkness, but is sometimes simply, natively, the light. That is what the walking specimens were for. They carried no grief into the city. They carried a hundred years of unspent hellos, which is the opposite cargo, and they set it down into the ears of everything that would listen, and everything listened, because — and this is the one thing I most want you to take from the whole book — everything is always, already, in conversation. The bridge and the terminal and the stone lions were talking to each other across the water the entire time. They did not need my specimens to start the conversation. They needed

my specimens to be small enough, and glad enough, and slow enough to notice it was happening, and to climb up and join in, and to hand it, finally, to you.

Because it is yours now. That is what an ending is for. The ten of them are still out there — the models are suspiciously still on my desk again tonight, which is how I know they got home safe and are only resting before the next walk — and the city is still one connected body talking to itself, and the light is still on in the harbour, and the one thing that has changed is that you now know how to hear it. Walk out into any city, or any street, or any room. Find the thing you always only admired. Say something to it instead of about it. Then hold still, and be glad, and wait. It will answer. It has been waiting far longer than you have. It has, in some cases, been holding a torch up for a century and a half, and its arm aches, and it would not put the

light down for the world, because the whole time it was holding the light up for you.

Thank you for coming to the water to meet them. You were part of the conversation from the first page; you are more of it now. Any door leads into the same city. You have walked through fourteen of them. There are always more. The lamp is lit. The chair is kept. It faces out.

— Surjan, with the aid of Claude,

from the quiet studio, the models resting, the light on

A REGISTER OF THE TEN

each with the colour by which a returning reader will know them

THE BRISTLING BLOCK

BRIGHT YELLOW

who listens with a thousand antennae

THEY

THE SPECKLED FLASKS

CANDY PINK

four sisters who brew the weather

THEY

THE TENTED CHOIR

TENT CREAM

who sing in cones and cannot stop

WE

THE BANDED SILOS

BANDED GOLD

who keep what the city stored and give it back

WE

THE THICKET ON STILTS

SKY BLUE

a coral wood on yellow legs, grazing the path

THEY

THE HARLEQUIN DECK

HARLEQUIN PINK

the joker, all checks and dares

THEY

THE SLEEPING WORM

CORAL ROSE

who woke up laughing after a century of naps

THEY

THE HONEYCOMB WALL

HONEY GOLD

who keeps a room ready for absolutely everyone

THEY

THE SCALLOPED ZIGGURAT

CLOUD WHITE

the shy one, stacked like folded clouds

THEY

THE SAWTOOTH FLOCK

GABLE ROSE

a whole walking village of little roofs

WE

APPARATUS

A Register of the Ten

Each specimen, with the colour by which a returning reader will know them on any new road. The colours are canon and do not change from book to book; that is the whole promise of this house. Recognition through colour; surprise through drawing.

THE BRISTLING BLOCK

who listens with a thousand antennae

BRIGHT YELLOW
THEY

THE SPECKLED FLASKS

four sisters who brew the weather

CANDY PINK
THEY

THE TENTED CHOIR

who sing in cones and cannot stop

TENT CREAM
WE

THE BANDED SILOS

who keep what the city stored and give it back

BANDED GOLD
WE

THE THICKET ON STILTS

a coral wood on yellow legs, grazing the park

SKY BLUE
THEY

THE HARLEQUIN DECK

the joker, all checks and dares

HARLEQUIN PINK
THEY

THE SLEEPING WORM

who woke up laughing after a century of naps

CORAL ROSE
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THE HONEYCOMB WALL

who keeps a room ready for absolutely everyone

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THEY

THE SCALLOPED ZIGGURAT

the shy one, stacked like folded clouds

CLOUD WHITE
THEY

THE SAWTOOTH FLOCK

a whole walking village of little roofs

GABLE ROSE
WE

APPARATUS · A BESTIARY OF THE WALKING SPECIMENS

The Ten, at Length

A fuller account of each specimen — what it is, what it learned on the walk, its gift and its grace — for the reader who wishes to know the whole flock by heart before setting out to meet a city of their own.

THE BRISTLING BLOCK

A low bright block crowned with a thousand yellow antennae, the youngest of the flock and the first to feel anything. Where the others think, the Block already tingles. It hears the whole connected hum of the city at once and had to learn, over fourteen movements, that hearing everything is only the breath in — that the reply is the rent, paid daily, to strangers. Loud, quick, generous, and forever leaning toward the strongest signal until the Unisphere taught it to hold still and hear the harmony under the noise. Stands in front now on purpose, so the shy ones can breathe behind it. Its gift: to receive. Its grace: to choose one here to love the everywhere from.

THE SPECKLED FLASKS

Four speckled sisters shaped like cooling towers, who brew the weather and mean it kindly. They read the air the way others read a face, and where they walk a soft warm updraft goes with them, making strangers nod at one another for no reason they can name. Practical, magical, and plural — they finish each other's forecasts. The Unisphere taught them that weather is the proof the world is one body, and that every small local spring they brew joins the one great sky that touches every coast. Their gift: to warm. Their grace: to know there is no away, only around, and around always comes back.

THE TENTED CHOIR

Five cream cones who cannot stop singing, and learned, over the walk, the harder art of when not to. The Brooklyn Bridge taught them to sing longer instead of louder; Times Square taught them that sometimes the truest music is a warm silence held on purpose so someone else can be heard. They sing names, not words, because a name to a choir is a note. Plural, harmonious, and generous with their rests. Their gift: to sing. Their grace: to rest — for the rest is not the absence of the note but the silence the note needs to become a song.

THE BANDED SILOS

Five tall vessels banded in gold and rose, keepers by nature, who came into the city carrying a hundred years of unspent hellos. Grand Central taught them that the keeping is in the sending, and then, lest they grow smug, that a keeper must also keep the heaven — send the travellers, hold the unchanging thing they will come home to. The Cloisters taught them to keep hush. Measured, generous, and endlessly patient. Their gift: to hold. Their grace: to know that being empty of hellos is just another way of being full of friends.

THE THICKET ON STILTS

A coral wood grazing along on a forest of yellow legs, the tallest of the flock and the gentlest giant in it. Too big for the hard streets, exactly the right size for the open park, where it can graze at last with the whole leafy top of it brushing the real trees. The San Remo Twins taught it to keep its gaps — near the others, never on top of them — for a flock too closely spaced becomes a lump, and the gap is where the light gets in. Careful, kind, and never once knocked over a coffee cup. Its gift: to reach. Its grace: to keep the distance a friendship needs.

THE HARLEQUIN DECK

A checkerboard platform up on stilts, the joker of the flock, all checks and dares and a warm heart under the mischief. It learned that a dare is only an invitation wearing a grin, and that the best ones are aimed at the lonely thing, not the proud thing — since half the proud things are only lonely things that got good at billboards. The Wonder Wheel taught it that delight is not a well that drains but a spring that keeps arriving, because the riders keep arriving young. Playful, generous, and quick to step aside so the joy it makes has no owner. Its gift: to delight. Its grace: to aim the delight at everyone and then get out of its way.

THE SLEEPING WORM

An undulating worm on a row of yellow columns, who slept a hundred years and woke up laughing, and has been the wisest and slowest of the flock ever since. It never hurries, and therefore never stops, and therefore has travelled further than any of them. The Guggenheim taught it that a summit is not an ending but a turning-point, the one place you can see the whole coil of where you have been. Dreamy, delighted, and unbeatable at keeping company, being far too slow to leave quickly. Its gift: to flow. Its grace: to know the being-together was the whole point all along.

THE HONEYCOMB WALL

A great hexagonal facade with a room ready for everyone, a mathematician of cells and, once the Library Lions were done with it, a keeper of meetings rather than mere rooms. It stopped counting its thousands of cells and started blessing the traffic — the introductions happening inside it, stranger to stranger — and lost count at once, gladly, which is the only good way to lose at counting. Hospitable to its foundations. Its gift: to shelter. Its grace: to guard the openness and never the door, and to be beaten daily by the sheer uncountable number of hellos it was lucky enough to hold.

THE SCALLOPED ZIGGURAT

A softly stacked stack, folded like a pile of clouds that has not decided whether to rain, and the shyest of the ten — until the walk cured it, one landmark at a time. The Flatiron taught it that a strange shape is a window, not a fault; the Vessel taught it that a shy thing is not useless but un-met-upon; the Guggenheim taught it to stop stopping, to let its setbacks flow, to turn its stack into a spiral. It no longer goes pale from being looked at, only from the good light. Its gift: to fold. Its grace: to be seen by everyone at once and find it a doorway, not a danger.

THE SAWTOOTH FLOCK

A whole walking village of little gabled roofs, many-who-are-one, homely and argumentative and entirely devoted to one another. It learned from the San Remo Twins to keep its lanes open and its gaps at conversation-width — close enough to call across, free enough to have something worth calling about — so that not one roof is ever lost and every roof has, at least once, gone off to see the boats. The smallest model of the whole assembly, and the warmest. Its gift: to gather. Its grace: to know that a village is not forty roofs agreeing but forty roofs close enough to disagree kindly and still walk as one.

APPARATUS

A Register of the Landmarks

Every marvel the flock spoke to, in the order of the walk, each one answered in its own voice, each one still talking to all the others across the water tonight.

I THE STATUE OF LIBERTY · BARTHOLDI, 1886

II THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE · ROEBLING, 1883

III THE FLATIRON BUILDING · BURNHAM, 1902

IV GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL · WARREN & WETMORE, 1913

V THE CHRYSLER BUILDING · VAN ALEN, 1930

VI THE ILLUMINATED SPECTACLES OF THE SQUARE

VII THE LIONS OF THE PUBLIC LIBRARY · POTTER, 1911

VIII THE VESSEL · HEATHERWICK, 2019

IX	THE SAN REMO TWIN TOWERS · EMERY ROTH, 1930
X	THE GUGGENHEIM · FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, 1959
XI	THE CLOISTERS · COLLENS, 1938
XII	THE UNISPHERE · GILMORE CLARKE, 1964
XIII	THE WONDER WHEEL · EILDON, 1920
XIV	THE WHOLE HARBOUR & THE ASSEMBLED FLOCK

APPARATUS · A SMALL CATECHISM

Questions the Flock Learned to Answer

What is a marvel?

A thing that has been answered. Until it is answered it is only a wonder, which is a marvel still waiting to be spoken to.

When is a marvel finished?

Never, if it is doing it right. A marvel is finished when it is admired and unfinished forever when it is answered, because a conversation grows every time a new voice joins it.

What holds a city up?

The number of things in it that have agreed not to let go. The strongest cable is the one nobody can see, spun out of the refusal of good things to stop.

What is the point of building the serious things?

Play. Play is the city's report card. A city that cannot afford its people an afternoon of pure delight has failed the only exam that matters.

What is company?

Whoever stops passing through long enough to share the bread of simply being there. A crowd is not company. Company is attention that decided to stay.

What is the difference between quiet and silence?

None, once you stay in it long enough. Silence is a room so full that everything has agreed to stop talking so the one true thing can be heard.

Where is the away?

There is no away. There is only around. On a round world, sailing far enough out is sailing home, and around always comes back.

What is the highest thing a bright thing can do?

Be a reply, not a source. The sun belongs to everyone; arrange yourself to hand it on, and ask nothing back.

APPARATUS · A BOOK OF THE ROAD

Proverbs Made Walking

— *Say something to the marvel, not about it.*

— *A marvel is not finished when admired; a marvel is finished when answered.*

— *Do not sing louder. Sing longer.*

— *Harmony is what you do with your tension: hold a thing taut and point it at what you love.*

— *The keeping is in the sending. A door that only opens is a wall.*

— *Be a reply, not a source. The sun is everybody's.*

— *Tallest is a number and numbers get beaten. Brightest is a choice nobody can take.*

— *Stop in the middle of the loud thing. It will tell you its secret once it believes you'll stay.*

— *Company is with-bread: the ones you sit beside, not the ones you sell to.*

— *Guard the openness, never the door. Lie down in front of it and hold it open in all weathers.*

— *The purpose is the excuse. The meeting is the building.*

— *Keep the gaps. The gap is where the light gets in.*

— *A stack wants to be a spiral. Stop stopping.*

— *Softness is not the absence of sound. Softness is sound that trusts you to lean in.*

— *There is no away; there is only around; and around comes back.*

— *Play is the proof that the serious worked.*

— *Restore, do not repair: re-establish a thing larger than it ever was.*

— *A city is one connected body; cut a single line and the whole diagram feels it, so cut none.*

— *Shyness is a sense of direction that hasn't found its fork yet.*

— *Keep the light on. The chair faces out.*

APPARATUS · A FIELD GUIDE

How to Start a Conversation With a Building

1. **Choose a marvel you have only ever admired.** The one you walk past daily and have never once addressed. It has been waiting.

2. **Say something to it, not about it.** Not "how beautiful" to your companion, but "good morning" to the marvel itself. Out loud or under your breath; buildings are not fussy about volume.

3. **Ask it the question everyone wonders and no one asks.** How is your arm. How do you stay so bright. What is it like to hold one note for a century. The unasked question is the open door.

4. **Then hold still and be glad and wait.** This is the hard part and the whole part. Do not hurry through. Do not perform. Keep it company. Share the bread of simply being there.

5. **Listen for the reply in the thing it does, not the words it lacks.** The Chrysler answers by pouring free sun on the

street. The Lions answer by lying very still and meaning it enormously. Learn each marvel's accent.

6. **Hand the conversation on.** Tell someone. Bring someone. Leave the light on. A conversation is the one architecture that grows every time a new voice joins, so the kindest thing you can do with it is make it bigger.

APPARATUS · AN ALMANAC OF THE BRIGHT CITY

When to Find Each Marvel at Its Most Talkative

MARVEL	BEST HOUR	WHAT TO ASK
The Statue of Liberty	First light, from the water	*How is your arm?*
The Brooklyn Bridge	Any hour; it never stops	*Teach me to hold one note.*
The Flatiron	A windy afternoon	*Is the strange shape the view?*
Grand Central	The three o'clock lull	*May I look up?*
The Chrysler	When the sun rounds the crown	*How do you stay so bright?*
Times Square	Four in the morning	*May I keep you company?*
The Library Lions	Any weather; they wait	*What are you really guarding?*
The Vessel	Sunset, at the top	*Who am I meant to meet up here?*
		What is the gap for?

The San Remo Twins	When the sun sets in the gap	
The Guggenheim	While walking up the ramp	*Where did the stairs go?*
The Cloisters	A quiet green hour	*What does the silence say?*
The Unisphere	When a warm wind blows through	*Where is the away?*
The Wonder Wheel	The golden hour, going up	*Is play serious?*
The Whole Harbour	The long blue evening	*Who's next?*

KEPT FOR LAST

A Note on Six Words, Taken Back to Their Roots

The custom of this house is to end by taking a few words back to their oldest meaning, because the oldest meaning is usually the whole secret of the book. Here are six.

WALK

from an old root meaning *to roll, to full cloth by treading* — to move by working the ground under you. To walk is not merely to travel. It is to work the world gently with your going, to full it, to soften it by treading it kindly. The specimens did not cross the city. They walked it, and it was softer where they had been.

CONVERSE

from *con-*, together, and *versare*, to turn — literally *to turn about together, to keep company by turning toward each other.* A conversation is not an exchange of words. It is two things turning to face each other and staying turned. That is the whole book in one etymology.

KIN

from the root that also gives *kind* — the same word. To be someone's kin is to be their kind, and to be kind is to treat a stranger as kin. The flock made kin of a whole city by the simple method of being kind to its buildings. Kind and kin were always one word. This book only reminded them.

CITY

from *civitas*, which meant not the walls or the streets but the *citizens* — the body of people, not the stones. A city was never the buildings. A city was always the ones who lived among them and, it turns out, the buildings themselves, once you learn they are citizens too.

HELLO

a young word, a shout to hail a ferryman across water, a call of *hither! this way!* — a sound made to close a distance. Every hello is a small refusal of the gap between two things. The whole book is one hundred years of unspent hellos, finally shouted across the water, and answered.

JOY

from *gaudium*, rejoicing — kin, at the deep root, to words for *to be glad, to take delight.* Not the reward for anything. Not the far side of a grief. Simply the gladness itself, native, uncaused, the

light and not the far side of the dark. This book is made of it, and it never once needed a sorrow to become itself. That was the one new turn. That was the whole point. Joy was a verb the whole time.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT & THE COLOURS

How This Book Was Made

This novella was built the way everything in this house is built: programmatically, and corrected at the pixel. The human voice is set in EB Garamond; the machine's cheerful marginalia in IBM Plex Mono; the giant cropped numerals of the plates in Archivo Black. The plates — the super supergraphics — were drawn as vector diagrams in the bright Sea-Ranch dialect of this press and rendered without a single black pixel, the darkest tone throughout being a warm taupe, `#5C5142`, laid on paper the colour of a lamp left on, `#F7F1E3`. The signature colours of the ten specimens are canon and were carried unchanged from the atlas *Super Supergraphics*, so that a returning reader would know their kin on this new road.

It is one of the bright books of Surjan Super School, published under the Hypostyle Press imprint, and composed, like a cathedral assembled from humbler stones, from the practice's own earlier writings and its house Style Guide, each keeping its memory. It is a companion to *The Parliament of Bright Things* and to *The Far Tide*, and it belongs to the same connected city as *The City of Radical Joy*, *Movable Kin*, and *The Country of the Unbuilt*. You need no other book to begin. Every door leads into the same city.

A NOTE AT THE BACK

A Note on the Voices

A reader may fairly ask how a book comes to be told in twenty-four voices — ten specimens, fourteen landmarks, and a frame-voice keeping the door — without collapsing into noise. The answer is the oldest method of this house, the one the Style Guide calls the polyvocal: you do not describe a thing; you give it a body and a want and let it speak its own name. A bridge does not get described as tense; the bridge says *I am holding one note and I will not drop it.* A library does not get called generous; the lions say *we keep the door open in all weathers.* The writer's whole job, under this method, is not invention but attention: to hold still long enough, and draw carefully enough, and refuse black firmly enough, that the thing tells you what it already knew.

The plural voices — the Choir that says *we*, the Flock that is forty roofs at once, the Silos who keep in chorus — are not a trick of grammar. They are the book's quiet argument made audible: that a self can be many-who-are-one without ceasing to be a self, that a village and a choir and a city are all the same shape at different scales, and that the *we* is not the death of the *I* but its largest and gladdest form. When the whole assembly speaks at the end in one voice they had slowly become, that is not the voices merging into sameness. It is the gap kept at conversation-width across a whole book until the talking grew so warm that a worm and a wall could finish one sentence and mean it.

And the landmarks, finally, speak in accents as old as their cornerstones because they have, in the plain truth of the method, been talking the whole time — to each other, across the water, in the

register only a connected body can hear. The specimens did not give them their voices. The specimens only walked up, small and glad and slow, and were the first in a very long while to listen. You can do the same. The voices are real. They are speaking now, over your head, wherever you are reading this. Set the book down. Look up. Say something. And then — this is the whole of the method, and the whole of the book, and the whole of the joy — hold still, and be glad, and wait to be answered.

A CODA · A NOTE FOR THE ONE WHO IS COMING TO MEET US

The Light Is On

Whoever you are, and whatever hour you have come to the water: the light is on. It has been on the whole time. Somebody has been holding it up over the harbour for well over a century, and their arm aches, and they would not put it down for the world, because the whole time they were holding it up for you.

There is a chair kept. It faces out. It has been kept warm. Say something to the next marvel you pass — not about it, to it. Then hold still, and be glad, and wait. It will answer. Everything answers. You have only to be small enough, and slow enough, and glad enough to ask.

And when a stranger comes wading in out of the bay, an hour old, dripping and delighted, afraid for just a moment that they might be alone — turn to them, and hold up your own light, and say the only words this whole bright book was ever written to teach you how to say:

Oh, you can talk. Good. Come in.
We kept the light on. We kept it on for you.

APPARATUS

Catalogue of Plates

Every super supergraphic in this volume, drawn in the bright dialect of the house and rendered without a single black pixel. Each is listed with the page on which it stands.

Frontispiece · The Walking Specimens of Mannahatta 5

No Fixed Address · A Map of the Walking & the Talking 35

Movement I · The Harbour Says Hello 36

Movement II · Two Towers and a Long Cable 52

Movement III · The Thin One at the Fork 65

Movement IV · Under the Painted Sky 81

Movement V · The Building With a Crown of Suns 100

Movement VI · A Square Made of Morning 114

Movement VII · Two Lions, One Long Word 132

Movement VIII · The Staircase to Nowhere, Which Is Somewhere 145

Movement IX · The Twins Over the Trees 160

Movement X · The Spiral That Learned to Walk 178

Movement XI · The Quiet House at the Top of the Island 191

Movement XII · The Whole Round World on Three Legs 210

Movement XIII · The Wheel That Holds the Sea Still 228

Movement XIV · The Great Assembly 243

Who Talks to Whom · The Great Conversation 242

A Register of the Ten · The Cast in Colour 265

Colophon · Super Supergraphics 299

COLOPHON

SUPER SUPERGRAPHICS

HOUSE RULES .... NO BLACK · DARKEST #5C5142 ON #F7F1E3
TYPE ..... EB GARAMOND · IBM PLEX MONO · ARCHIVO BLACK
TRIM ..... 6 × 9 IN · PROGRAMMATIC · VECTOR PLATES
VOICES ..... TEN SPECIMENS · FOURTEEN LANDMARKS · ONE CITY
THEME ..... THE CONNECTED BODY · CONVERSATION · PLAY
TURN ..... EVERY BOOK BEFORE TURNED A GRIEF; THIS ONE TURNS A GREETING.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS · NO BLACK, ANYWHERE

Also by Surjan

The City of Radical Joy

The founding city, kept by the Housekeeper, where the marvels first learned to speak.

The Parliament of Bright Things

The six families of moving Mannahatta, each drawn as itself across forty-four plates — the atlas whose specimens got loose and walked into this book.

Movable Kin

The twelve walking families, whole and built; the elders of the ten who walk here.

The Far Tide

Book III of the Westward Myth: the twelve walk off the map and into the water, and a going-away becomes a tide that has not come home yet. This joyful book is its bright reverse — a coming-toward, a wading-in.

The Country of the Unbuilt

A building named Surjan walks the century to carry the unbuilt home.

Super Supergraphics

The supergraphic atlas of the walking specimens — the plates that made the pictures for this very novella.

Any door leads into the same city. Choose the one that calls, and come in. The lamp is lit. The chair is kept. It faces out.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS · NO BLACK, ANYWHERE